

WHAT AM I GONNA DO WITH MY LIFE?: EXPLORING THE TRANSITIONAL
EXPERIENCES OF FORMER DIVISION 1 BLACK, MALE, FIRST-GENERATION
COLLEGE BASKETBALL AND FOOTBALL STUDENT-ATHLETES INTO THE
WORLD OF WORK

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by
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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the dissertation entitled

WHAT AM I GONNA DO WITH MY LIFE?: EXPLORING THE TRANSITIONAL EXPERIENCES OF FORMER DIVISION 1 BLACK, MALE, FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE BASKETBALL AND FOOTBALL STUDENT-ATHLETES INTO THE WORLD OF WORK

presented by Christopher D. Lewis,

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and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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DEDICATION

I would like to thank my parents whom I endearingly call Moms and Pops for their unwavering love and support during this journey. The phone calls, encouragement, and support were immense during this Ph.D. journey. You all nurtured me into the man I am today and have consistently pushed me to achieve this goal. I know that my time in school has felt never-ending (I've been going nonstop since you all dropped me off in kindergarten at St. Albert the Great in 1996). Nonetheless, you all have been my biggest cheerleaders. You all have sacrificed so much for me to be in this position today. I sit back and reminisce about my maturation through each level of school, personal development camps, CYO basketball, AAU basketball, and high school sports. You all have been the best set of parents I could ever have. I know that regardless of the circumstances, you all will always be there. From attending every sporting event to encouraging every academic pursuit to offering life advice, your love has been unconditional. I know that this project, much less any other feat of mine, would not have happened without your steadfast love. I am only here because of who you both are. Words cannot thank you all enough! Also, I want to send a note to Magic Lewis and Tania Lewis. Tania, I know that you are setting your own path and I hope this journey serves as inspiration for where life takes you. I thank you for your support and love, and your curiosity as it pushes me to be the best example of a brother I can be. Magic, you may be the family dog, but you are a loyal companion. I thank you for being with me during those long nights of studying during my master's program and sitting beside me as I began going through the literature for this project (you still owe me a few pages by the way).

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AAU	Amateur Athletic Union
CIF	California Interscholastic Federation
HBCU	Historically Black Colleges and Universities
NAIA	National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics
NBA	National Basketball Association
NCAA	National Collegiate Athletic Association
NFL	National Football League
PWI	Predominantly White Institutions

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ABSTRACT

The transition into the world of work for Division 1 student-athletes is important because there are slim chances to achieve a professional athletic playing career. This research study aims to explore the career transitional experiences of former Division 1 Black, male, first-generation college basketball and football student-athletes as they hold overrepresented identities in Division 1 basketball and football. Specifically, the research aims to address these questions: (1) What factors affect how former Division 1 Black, male, first-generation college basketball and football student-athletes navigate their transition from sport into sport-related careers not involving competitive athletic play? (2) What factors affect how former Division 1 Black, male, first-generation college basketball and football student-athletes navigate their transition from sport into non-sport-related careers? Data collection occurred through 70- to 110-minute semi-structured interviews with 7 former Division 1 Black, male, first-generation college basketball and football student-athletes. Interviews shared during college and after college experiences that shaped their transition into sport-related and non-sport-related careers. Findings from this study presented five emergent themes addressing the research questions: (1) Athletic Identity Reinforcement, (2) Lack of Self-Directed Choices, (3) Connection through Identifiable Spaces, (4) Village-Based Support, and (5) Career Decision-Making

Difficulties. These findings illustrate the complications of pursuing career planning while participating in Division 1 basketball and football.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The NBA and the NFL are ultimate dreams for athletic youth, but these feats are elusive fantasies for most Division 1 basketball and football student-athletes. In 2019, Division 1 men's basketball and football had roughly 35,000 student-athletes with Black men representing 56% and 49% of each respective sport (Irick, 2019). However, less than 2% of all basketball and football student-athletes will achieve a major professional athletic playing career (NCAA, 2019a). Despite these slim chances, over 60% of Division 1 male football and basketball student-athletes believe they will become a professional athlete in their sport (Paskus & Bell, 2016). Consequently, many basketball and football student-athletes will face disappointment in their career expectations and the vast majority are Black men. According to Gallup, Inc. (2016), 75% of former male student-athletes were employed full-time with only 3% of them being unemployed. However, most former student-athletes are not passionate about their work as data has shown only 42% of those with full-time employment being fully engaged at work (Gallup, Inc., 2016). While the employment data is compelling, it offers an incomplete and inadequate picture of employment success for student-athletes because there is no context explaining what the employment experience means to the individual student-athletes. In addition, over 50% of Division 1 basketball and football student-athletes expect their careers to involve sports (Paskus & Bell, 2016), but sport-related jobs accounted for less than 4% of the labor force in 2018 with Black professionals holding 7.5% of these jobs (Department for Professional Employees, 2019). Consequently, there is a clear notion that Black male student-athletes face slim chances of maintaining sports in their professional futures, but

this data does not illustrate the student-athletes' journeys to their current career endeavors and how their history might contribute to their present experience.

A key component of understanding the transitional experiences of student-athletes is graduation. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2020), men from ages 25 to 34 were employed at a rate of 91% when they attained a bachelor's degree or higher, but the employment rate decreases to 86% for men who had some college experience but did not finish with a degree. In 2019, the graduation success rates in Division 1 basketball and football were 79% and 78% for Black men and 93% and 90% for White men in their respective sport (NCAA, 2019b). Overall, the graduation success rates for all Division 1 basketball and football student-athletes are 83% and 82%, respectively (NCAA, 2019b). Despite recent increases in graduation success rates for Division 1 basketball and football (NCAA, 2019b), Black men still lag behind the graduation trend of their White counterparts and the overall graduation success rate, which could yield post-college employment challenges. Given these graduation and employment rates, it seems that Division 1 Black male basketball and football student-athletes face a complex decision regarding their pursuit of sport-related endeavors beyond college. Moreover, their collegiate development in athletics and academics frame how they envision their post-college futures. Therefore, unpacking the student-athlete experience seems consequential to grasping how student-athletes approach their transition from sport into the world of work.

In addition to racial identity, first-generation status offers important statistics to consider with transitioning from sport into the world of work. Within Division 1 athletics, 14% of student-athletes identify as first-generation; however, less than half of all first-

generation student-athletes would have attended a four-year institution if they were not a college athlete (NCAA, 2016). Though these statistics suggest that college access was promoted by athletic participation, post-college expectations spark important concerns. According to Gallup, Inc. (2020), 36% of first-generation college student-athletes earn a good job following graduation compared to 30% of first-generation college students who did not participate in athletics. Although these statistics are reassuring, first-generation college student-athletes have internal and external pressures of manifesting sport-related careers. According to the NCAA (2016), 26% of first-generation college student-athletes had family members who expected them to earn a professional athletic playing career whereas only 12% of non-first-generation college student-athletes reported similar expectations. Also, first-generation college student-athletes reported greater personal expectations of achieving a professional athletic playing career or a sport-related career. As previously stated, sport-related jobs represent a small sector of the workforce. Therefore, the professional aspirations of first-generation student-athletes are disproportionate to the available opportunities. In addition, the pressure to become a professional athlete is compounded by familial expectations. Consequently, exploring the experiences of first-generation student-athletes seems imperative to understanding how they transition into the world of work.

Though the previous statistics provide a limited view of career outcomes, the student-athlete college experience offers additional insight into challenges with transitioning into the world of work. Paskus and Bell (2016) found that male basketball student-athletes average 34 weekly hours and football student-athletes average 40 weekly hours or more in athletic participation, which equals or exceeds the Division 1 average of

34 hours. In academics, male basketball student-athletes average 37 weekly hours and football student-athletes average 34 weekly hours in academic participation, which falls below the Division 1 average of 38.5 hours (Paskus & Bell, 2016). Furthermore, over 70% of men's basketball and football student-athletes reported spending an equal or greater amount of time on offseason athletic activities compared to in-season athletic activities (Paskus & Bell, 2016). In addition, 59% of male Division 1 student-athletes indicated that they would prefer more time dedicated to academic work (Paskus & Bell, 2016). Regardless of the season, male basketball and football student-athletes appear to be more engaged in athletic activities than academic activities, which corroborates with research citing the imbalance in the student-athlete college experience (Kelly & Dixon, 2014). With more emphasis on athletic participation, these student-athletes might be unable to pursue alternative passions and interests, if a professional athletic playing career is not achieved. Therefore, exploring how male basketball and football student-athletes view their individual identity may illuminate potential successes and pitfalls with transitioning into the world of work.

Since Division 1 student-athletes devote more time to athletic participation, their self-concept might overemphasize and favor their athletic identity (Brewer, van Raalte, & Linder, 1993). Shavelson, Hubner, and Stanton (1976) indicated that a person's self-concept is affirmed through the person's actions, which influences their self-perception. By spending more time in athletic settings, male basketball and football student-athletes might not view themselves outside of an athletic lens. Consequently, this structure might affect how these student-athletes approach non-athletic endeavors. Previous research has shown that Black student-athletes receive messages from others that reinforce a salient

athletic identity (Beamon, 2012). More generally, research has also shown that student-athletes with high aspirations for a professional athletic playing career showed greater identification with their athletic identity even when this goal was not likely to materialize (Benson, Evans, Surya, Martin, & Eys, 2015). With overemphasis in athletic identity, research has shown negative effects on career maturity (Houle & Kluck, 2015), career decision making self-efficacy (Brown, Glastetter-Fender, & Shelton, 2000), and identity foreclosure (Murphy, Petitpas, & Brewer, 1996). However, research has not explored how athletic identity influences student-athletes' self-perception and how their self-concept facilitates or inhibits the transition from competitive athletic play into the world of work. This perspective might uncover important considerations of how student-athletes identify potential career options based on fit.

Since self-concept influences the people and environments to which a person connects, belongingness also seems essential to how student-athletes approach their transition into the world of work. Baumeister and Leary (1995) define belongingness as a person's need to belong to groups with value and meaning. As shown above, Division 1 basketball and football student-athletes spend much of their time participating in athletic activities. Therefore, it seems that the spaces in which they would feel most connected would be sport related. Paskus and Bell (2016) indicate that Division 1 male student-athletes report a strong connection to their college campus with White male student-athletes reporting at 78% and non-White male student-athletes reporting at 69%. However, student-athletes shared increased reports of their closest friends being other student-athletes (Paskus & Bell, 2016). This information implies a positive sense of belongingness but does not clarify the experiences of Black student-athletes and whether

their belongingness is related to the campus environment or their respective team.

Furthermore, this data suggests that Division 1 student-athletes share more connection within the athletic environment. Since the integration of student-athletes in non-sport-related spaces is indistinct, exploring student-athletes' sense of belongingness might offer additional insight into how they approach their transition into the world of work.

The present study intended to gather narrative accounts of former Division 1 Black, male, first-generation college basketball and football student-athletes regarding their experiences of transitioning from competitive athletic play into the world of work. Given the statistics about academic and athletic engagement, campus belongingness, and graduation rates, it seems that Division 1 Black, male, first-generation college football and basketball student-athletes would experience greater challenges with navigating their transition. Furthermore, most former Division 1 student-athletes convey decreased interest in their work, which begs the question: what initially led these student-athletes to select their career endeavors? Since athletic participation is most prominent for male Division 1 basketball and football student-athletes, it also seems likely that athletic identity might influence how they transition into the world of work. Specifically, this study aimed to answer the following two research questions:

- (1) What factors affect how former Division 1 Black, male, first-generation college basketball and football student-athletes navigate their transition from sport into sport-related careers not involving competitive athletic play?
- (2) What factors affect how former Division 1 Black, male, first-generation college basketball and football student-athletes navigate their transition from sport into non-sport-related careers?

Prior research has illuminated the transitional experiences of collegiate student-athletes from the perspectives of coaches (Bjornsen & Dinkel, 2017), helping professionals (Leonard & Schimmel, 2016; van Raalte, Andrews, Cornelius, Brewer, & Petitpas, 2017), and self-report ratings (Burns, Jasinski, Dunn, & Fletcher, 2013; Houle & Kluck, 2015; Huang, Hung, & Chou, 2016; McQuown-Linnemeyer & Brown, 2010). However, limited research has amplified the voices of student-athletes regarding how their college experiences have affected their transition from competitive athletic play into the world of work. This research centered on the student-athlete's voice to understand how athletic identity has influenced their career trajectory. As a result, this explorative approach unveiled critical considerations and nuances for helping first-generation Black male basketball and football student-athletes experience a more adaptive transition from competitive athletic play into the world of work.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter established the theoretical underpinning for this study and explored existing literature for this research. Specifically, this study was framed through these theoretical lenses: transition, theory, social identity theory, and the theory of work adjustment. These theories were outlined to propose explanations how Black men endure their transition from sport into the world of work. With this theoretical underpinning, relevant literature was explored regarding the following topics: identity, belongingness, first-generation college students, and college-to-work transitional experiences. Given the focus on transitioning, identity was the first topic explored as it demonstrated the value of the individual self. For humans, social identities reinforced self-concept, which contributed to how people view themselves. Since this study focused on Black male student-athletes, the reviewed literature unpacked previous research on athletics, gender, race, and education. Next, the literature explores belongingness to present claims about interpersonal connections and how they affect a person's integration in different environments. Since multiple identity lenses were considered, belongingness was critical to capturing how a person's salient identity helped them navigate their experiences. Also, this study emphasized the first-generation college experience, which created unique outcomes and considerations. Therefore, the literature reviewed important findings about first-generation college students during and after college enrollment. Upon exploring these topics, the literature review uncovered important findings about college students and their transitional experiences into the world of work, which suggested probable outcomes for the current study's participants.

Theoretical Framing

Since this study explored former student-athletes transitioning from competitive athletic play into the world of work, there are several lenses through which these experiences can be understood. Specifically, these experiences focused on transitions within the career context. In addition, individual identity was paramount given the focus on role change and how one's identity might shift. Given the focus of this study, the following theories were included to frame the analysis of student-athletes transitioning into the world of work: transition theory (Schlossberg, 1995), social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), and theory of work adjustment (Lofquist & Dawis, 1969). These theories were relevant to the current study as they will provide background regarding how identity shapes one's transitional process into a new career trajectory, or work environment. Since these theories are extensive, select portions of each theory were implemented to explain the experiences captured through this study. However, the following subsections describe the individual theories, then the final subsection includes a synthesis to describe how all three theories will be combined to explore the current study.

Transition theory. Nancy Schlossberg's (1995) transition theory explores how adults navigate a transition and continue life beyond the precipitating event. Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman (1995) defines a transition as "any event or non-event that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles (p. 27)." However, the person enduring the experience has the power to label an event as a transition. Transition theory suggests adults' life experiences will incur different moments of change. Through these changes, the transitioning person moves through a model which illustrates different

challenges and objectives for adapting to the transition. While navigating this process, the transition is affected by the following four factors: *situation*, *self*, *support*, and *strategies*. Each factor is important to understanding how a person will navigate the transition and what challenges might arise while enduring the process. The transition model and influencing factors combine to provide a comprehensive perspective of the transition process.

Schlossberg's transition model is founded on Meryl Louis' integrative model of the transition process. Louis' (1980b) model suggests that navigating transitions involves the following three phases: *moving in*, *moving through*, and *moving out*. Though this model operates in a stepwise form, the starting point begins with either *moving in* or *moving out*. In the *moving out* phase, the transitioning person seeks to dissociate from prior strivings to pursue imminent endeavors and obligations. In this phase, the transitioning person might experience grief due to identity shifts and resist change to maintain normalcy or preferred structures. The *moving in* phase follows next in which the transitioning person immerses into the new circumstances. This phase might involve reconciling a previous identity, orienting to a new identity, acculturating new beliefs, and learning new expectations. The *moving through* phase captures the transitioning person's quest for stability. At this point, the transitioning person has acquired foundational knowledge and skills for the transition and seeks long-term maintenance. Given Louis' model, there is a linear process comprising a person's transition. Within this framework, Schlossberg repackages Louis' integrative model of the transition process to illustrate how a person might navigate and endure transitions.

According to Schlossberg's (1995) transition model, there are three parts: *Approaching Transitions*, *Taking Stock of Coping Resources*, and *Taking Charge*. Like Louis' transition model, the transitioning person moves through each part in a linear fashion. *Approaching Transitions* is the first part in which the transitioning person identifies the transition's nature and context. Transitions occur at unique, yet specific, times, which spark ideas of how a person might endure the transition process. Therefore, the transition's difficulty can be assessed by the precipitating event and concurrent circumstances affecting the transition. *Taking Stock of Coping Resources* is the next part in which the transitioning person identifies means for navigating the transition. This part focuses on the 4 S System, which represents the four factors of transitions: *situation*, *self*, *support*, and *strategies*. The 4 S System is critical to how the transitioning person navigates the transition. *Taking Charge* is the model's final part in which the transitioning person reinforces internal and external means for enduring the transition process. Though each part is a distinct process, the first and final parts of the transition model intersect with the 4 S System. Specifically, *Approaching Transitions* involves the *situation* factor through contextualizing the transition's precipitating event and how it contributes to the imminent transition experience. Conversely, *Taking Charge* extends the *strategies* factor in that coping skills and resources are fortified for transitional endurance. Ultimately, these three parts offer a comprehensive view of transitions.

The initial part of Schlossberg's transition model, *Approaching Transitions*, analyzes the transition's precipitating factors and context. In this period, the transitioning person is orienting to the change process. The transitioning person determines the transition type and indicates how this transition affects current life structures and

responsibilities. Transitions are categorized under the three following types: anticipated, unanticipated, or non-event. Also, non-event transitions are delineated into the following three subcategories: personal, ripple, and resultant. Anticipated transitions include events intended and predictable, whereas unanticipated transitions include events for which there was no plan or expectancy. On the other hand, non-event transitions include occasions where there were expectations, but these expectations did not manifest and led to an adjustment for a person's life. Specifically, Personal, non-event transitions involve individual aspirations that are unfulfilled. Ripple, non-event transitions include a person's experiences changing due to witnessing unfulfilled expectations of a person to whom they are close. Lastly, resultant, non-event transitions represent a certain activity occurring, which spawns a non-event.

Within this study's context, an anticipated transition would be a student-athlete planning to enter the workforce given that chances to compete professionally were slim or nonexistent. An unanticipated transition would be a student-athlete suffering a career-ended injury, which forces this person to consider alternative occupational pursuits. With respect to non-event transitions, a personal, non-event transition would be a student-athlete not getting drafted or signed to a professional team, which prompts a life change. A ripple, non-event transition would involve a student-athlete changing career aspirations after discovering a teammate did not get drafted or signed by a professional team. A resultant, non-event transition would include a student-athlete experiencing a coaching change, resulting in less playing time and the result of not being drafted or signed by a professional team. Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman (1995) indicate transitions are relative to each person according to individual appraisal, based in a contextual lens, and

predicated by the impact on the person. Identifying the type of transition might frame how the person experiences and endures the transition. This information might determine triumphs and challenges experienced during the transition. Consequently, this information affects the significance of each influencing transition factor and the journey through the transition model.

The second part of Schlossberg's transition model, *Taking Stock of Coping Resources*, explores the factors of 4 S System: *situation, self, support, and strategies*. Though the period of *Approaching Transitions* sets the stage for the impending process, these four factors guide the person through the transition process. *Situation* reflects the person's assessment of what is occurring to bring about the transition. This factor comprises the precipitating event and how it impacts the imminent transitional activities. Within this main factor, the following sub-factors are contributing elements: trigger, timing, control, role change, duration, previous experience, concurrent stress, and assessment. The *situation* factor encompasses what is happening and how the person is viewing the event and upcoming activities. Specifically, the transitioning person identifies what is sparking the transition (trigger) and determines if this transition is arising in a favorable moment (timing). Furthermore, the transitioning person determines if they have a facilitative position in the process (control) and identifies what part will they play in the transition (role change). Also, the transitioning person evaluates how long they expect the transition to last (duration) and determines if they have endured a similar process (previous experience). Lastly, the transitioning person acknowledges any direct or indirect pressures (concurrent stress) and appraises the severity of the transition (assessment).

Self analyzes the person enduring the transition and how that person is situated within the transition. This factor provides an individual context for understanding the transition and how it might unfold. Each person has a history and intersecting identities, which affect how they will engage in life experiences. Within the factor of *self*, personal and demographic characteristics and psychological resources are contributing sub-factors. Personal and demographic characteristics include a person's social identities and how they affect the person's interaction within the environment. Psychological resources comprise the individual nature of a person, such as ego development, self-efficacy, and values (Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995). Two people might experience the same transition, but their social identities will affect how their individual transitions unfold. Therefore, exploring the idiosyncratic characteristics of a person can unveil how a person might endure certain experiences and circumstances.

Support reflects the accessible resources of help that might help a person navigate a transition. Support represents a layered combination of resources each person considers as valuable forms of assistance. Transition theory indicates support is rooted in the following categories: type, function, and measurement. Transition theory borrows from existing literature, which suggests types of support include the following: intimate relationships, family, friend groups, and institutions and/or communities (Lowenthal & Weiss, 1976). Intimate relationships include both romantic and platonic connections but are differentiated from family and extended webs of friends. Also, institutions and/or communities include less immediate connections, such as schools, religious groups, and community support groups. Within these types of support, transition theory champions the following functions of support: affect, affirmation, aid (Kahn & Antonucci, 1980),

and honest feedback (Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995). Affect comprises indications of appreciation and care, whereas affirmation includes approval of one's behavior or actions. Aid contains resources, such as funds, knowledge, material items, and time to assist with one's process. Honest feedback encompasses communication that is either positive or negative regarding one's decisions or current actions. Lastly, measurement of social support assesses the value of the people closest to the transitioning person based on their presented assistance (Kahn, 1975). Though a person might have several sources of support, the impact might vary according to the transitioning person's assessment. Therefore, understanding how affect, affirmation, and aid are evaluated by a person will dictate the significance of social support.

Strategies emphasize the coping skills identified to help a person endure the transition. As a person progresses through the transition, there will be skills and tactics acquired, which might contribute to easing the process. These attributes will shape how the person responds to the transition and associated stressors. Transition theory champions three coping methods: "Responses that modify the situation, responses that control the meaning of the problem, and responses that help manage the stress (Pearlin & Schooler, 1978, p. 5)." When striving to modify the situation, the transitioning person enacts alternative behaviors to adjust the circumstances of the transition. To control the meaning of the problem, the transitioning person entertains a different appraisal to consider a more adaptive and functional view of the transition. In managing stress, the transitioning person incorporates new behaviors to minimize the pressure stemming from the transition.

Schlossberg's transition theory provides an important lens for analyzing transitions. The 4 S System suggests multiple factors affect transitions, which indicate potential challenges and barriers. Within the context of student-athletes, previous literature emphasizes social support and strategies for transitions. While these two factors are consequential to transitions, the self receives minimal consideration. Previous research indicates student-athletes over-identify with their athletic identity; however, the effect of over-identifying with sport has not been examined with respect to transition outcomes. Therefore, the individual self is consequential to how a person makes sense of their transition and strives to endure their transitional process. As a result, the individual self will unveil how people determine their salient social identities and what influence these identities have on the lived reality. As a result, Henri Tajfel's social identity theory unpacks how social identities develop, which informs a person's self-concept.

Social identity theory. Social identity theory proposes a person's self-concept is based on his awareness of being a member of a social group and acknowledging value and emotional connection to that group (Tajfel, 1972, 1978, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Furthermore, social identity is shaped by group characteristics rather than individual characteristics (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Abrams & Hogg, 1990). A person's self-concept is rooted within social interactions, which is influenced by the social environment and interpersonal activity (Turner, 1982). The group to which a person belongs shapes how they view themselves. Therefore, intrapsychic identity perspectives are suppressed or disregarded to assume the group identity. Tajfel (1978) indicates a group is defined by its cognitive, evaluative, and emotional components. Thus, embracing a social identity includes the following: acknowledging one's group

membership (cognitive), accepting that group membership invites public scrutiny (evaluative), and expressing personal sensitivities regarding the group's structure, identity, and external relationships (emotional). Also, social identity is founded on Referent Informational Influence (RII), which conveys how a person's environment affects their self-labeling. RII is a staged process in which a person identifies with a specific social identity, embraces behaviors associated with the social identity, and demonstrates increased social identity alignment through behavioral norms (Turner, 1982). Ultimately, social identity theory suggests individuals assimilate group standards to generate their self-identity.

In addition to comparative distinctions, social identity is driven by shared intragroup experiences. Specifically, Capozza and Brown (2000) convey that common fate, which suggests similar structural boundaries spur experiential similarities for two or more people, is a key element of social identity. For example, competitive expectations might limit student-athletes' academic participation. Their training regimen could conflict with classes of interest and additional enrichment opportunities. However, shared fate, which suggests that the outcomes for members of a group are the same, is not a constant element of social identity (Capozza & Brown, 2000). Though student-athletes might experience limited academic participation opportunities, every student-athlete is not destined for poor post-graduate outcomes. Therefore, social identity groups must consider distinctive intergroup differences and acknowledge intragroup differences.

Since distinctive characteristics are important to social identity groups, external evaluation is a considerable factor. Furthermore, several assumptions are implicit to social identity theory. Social identity is based on the following assumptions: (1)

individuals desire a positive self-concept, (2) groups and group membership carry positive or negative implications, and (3) group reputation is based on comparisons between both in-group and out-group perspectives (Turner & Brown, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). These assumptions establish the foundation for associating with specific social identity groups. Group members are seeking an identity to embody, while maintaining a favorable external perception. These assumptions underpin the principles of social identity, which indicate the following: (1) individuals want to embrace a positive social identity, (2) a positive social identity suggests a favorable perception of the in-group as compared to the out-group, and (3) individuals will pursue a more positive social identity group or facilitate a more favorable outward appearance to their social identity group when dissatisfied. Given these assumptions and principles, each person navigates which social identities are most salient. Consequently, this process determines the integration of one's personal identity with their human identity.

According to Abrams and Hogg (1990), social identity theory asserts self-concept as a compilation of self-images, which can be fluid in terms of salience for the individual. Given that a person holds several social identities, some of these identities will be more prominent for a person based on the context. When one or more social identities become prominent, the person is presumed to behave in accordance with customary practices of a group (Abrams & Hogg, 1990). For example, a prominent athletic identity might be characterized by daily engagement in athletic training, prioritization of athletic obligations over non-athletic obligations, and attire signifying the person's athletic sport. Therefore, it would be expected that all persons with a salient athletic identity would engage in such behaviors. Conversely, personal identity is the notion that a person might

have salient social identities but does not always express behaviors expected by any group member. Instead, their actions are individualized so that they are distinguished from other group members (Abrams & Hogg, 1990). This notion asserts the principle of self-categorization theory, which indicates how people are grouped together based on perceived similarities (Hogg & McGarty, 1990). For instance, someone who asserts athletic identity, academic identity, and race might have a more nuanced expression of their personal identity. Their sport might occupy much of their time; however, they also demonstrate significant involvement in academic groups, study sessions, and affinity group activities. Also, they might consider how race, athletic development, and academic performance influences their well-being in different spaces, rather than prioritizing one social identity as supreme. Since student-athletes embrace several social identities, their self-concept might dictate their transitional experience once competitive athletic play ends. Therefore, Dawis and Lofquist's theory of work adjustment offers important considerations regarding work transitions and how student-athlete might navigate new work environments.

Theory of work adjustment. The theory of work adjustment emphasizes that successful employment is contingent upon an interplay between the person and the environment (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984; Lofquist & Dawis, 1969). The person must have skills needed by the work environment, and the environment should reinforce needs important to the individual. Dawis (1980) proposes that person-environment correspondence theory underscores the theory of work adjustment in that there is a “mutual responsiveness” factor, which means that both the environment and the person have needs met through their interaction. This factor separates the theory of work

adjustment from other person-environment theories because there is also consideration of how the environment aligns with the person (Leonard & Schimmel, 2016). Therefore, the connection of a person to a work environment shares a bidirectional relationship.

According to Lofquist and Dawis (1969), there are two factors that determine whether a person and a chosen work environment are a viable match: satisfaction and satisfactoriness. Satisfaction describes the needs and health of the person, whereas satisfactoriness describes sufficient completion of work tasks (Hesketh & Griffin, 2005). Satisfaction ensures that the person can embody personal beliefs and desires in the workplace, while satisfactoriness ensures the person demonstrates acceptable work functionality. In addition, Lofquist and Dawis (1969) indicate that the following four elements influence satisfaction and satisfactoriness: the person's skills, the person's virtues, the job demands, and the job's guiding principles. More alignment between the person's skills and the job demands might yield greater satisfactoriness. Also, more alignment between the person's virtues and the job's guiding principles might produce greater satisfaction. The theory of work adjustment uses satisfactoriness and satisfaction to predict tenure, or how long a person might remain with a job (Lofquist & Dawis, 1984). Furthermore, the theory of work adjustment suggests that work environments seek persons who will meet the job demands while workers seek jobs that will meet their fundamental needs (Eggerth, 2008). Ultimately, the theory of work adjustment demonstrates that there is a reciprocal relationship between the person and the environment to determine fit.

The theory of work adjustment is a newer theory with limited research; however, there are some important findings based on this theory. As indicated, the theory of work

adjustment emphasizes the needs of the work environment and the individual person. Therefore, the theory of work adjustment accounts for changes in a person's work environment, which would be expected when transitioning between positions (Leonard & Schimmel, 2016). Also, the reciprocal approach to determining person-environment fit acknowledges the fluid natures of the work environment and the person (Caldwell, Herold, & Fedor, 2004). Though each person and work environment bring their own qualities and desires, there is space for evolution, which might influence how a person and their work environment align. Implementing the theory of work adjustment with lower socioeconomic African Americans showed that positive race relations in the workplace led greater job satisfaction and decreased likelihood of employee turnover (Lyons, Velez, Mehta, & Neill, 2014). Also, Leonard and Schimmel (2016) unveiled that elements of the theory of work adjustment were not prominent in terms of helping collegiate student-athletes navigate the transition from competitive athletic play. Therefore, this study might capture unique implications for integrating first-generation Black male student-athletes into a new work environment, which could facilitate career exploration and academic development interventions.

Theoretical synthesis. Given the focus of this study, transition theory, social identity, and the theory of work adjustment provide consequential lenses to exploring the process of student-athletes transition from competitive athletic play. As stated, Schlossberg's (1995) transition theory identifies four factors—*situation*, *self*, *strategies*, and *support*—as consequential components to transitions. However, the present study will focus on the factor of *self* within transition theory with respect to former Division 1 Black, male, first-generation college basketball and football student-athletes transitioning

from competitive athletic play into the world of work. Consequently, Tajfel and Turner's (1979) social identity theory factors into this study because it conveys how self-concept manifests through social connections, which can influence behaviors and beliefs. Specifically, Division 1 student-athletes have their unique culture based on their shared experiences. Furthermore, the separate concerns of Black first-generation male college students create additional identity layers that establish important considerations for navigating transitions into the world of work. Lastly, Lofquist and Dawis's (1969) theory of work adjustment proposes that entering a new work environment involves a mutual exchange in which the needs of the person and work environment are both met. Therefore, these theories will combine to provide a comprehensive understanding of how the student-athlete experience affects transitions into sport-related and non-sport-related jobs.

The factor of *self* within transition theory (Schlossberg, 1995) coincides with social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) in that each person embraces intersecting identities that affect their experiences. Though some social identities are more salient than others, the person's self-concept will influence their individual experience of transitioning. Upon considering this overlap, the theory of work adjustment (Lofquist & Dawis, 1969) would suggest that a person's self-concept and salient identities influence jobs and work environments that they choose. For the present study, these theories would suggest that former Division 1 Black, male, first-generation college basketball and football student-athletes would pursue work environments in which their identities as athletes would flourish. Since athletic participation is significant in their experience, these student-athletes would pursue career paths that allow them to demonstrate their

expertise and pursue activities that spark their interests. However, there might be instances in which these student-athletes pursue non-sport-related careers because they have engaged and developed additional salient identities. Although sport participation might have still been significant, there are other values or important identities that the student-athlete wanted to develop. Therefore, student-athletes who pursue non-sport-related careers might be seeking environments in which they have some expertise, or at the very least, find value in the career discipline. Ultimately, these pursuits would allow the former student-athlete to exhibit competence while also fulfilling a role that is meaningful.

Identity

Overall social identity development. According to Shavelson, Hubner, & Stanton (1976), one's social identity is formulated by the socializing messages a person receives and internalizes. The way people see themselves relies on reinforced messages of how others view them. Based on this image, a person determines how he might align with distinct groups to generate a social identity. Tajfel (1978b) cites individual self-definition as the idea in which a person has membership in multiple groups, which contributes to a person's self-image. Furthermore, Turner (1982) discusses the concept of social identification, which is the process of internalizing social identities so that it permeates one's self-concept. Though group membership comprises a collective social identity, each person individuates his social identity based on which group membership identity holds more personal value (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Consequently, social identity is subsumed within self-concept and comprises the interplay between a person's behavior and environment (Tajfel, 1978a; Turner, 1982). As a person engages in more experiences,

there are many groups to which he will connect. However, each group connection will assume a different level of salience for the person. As a result, each person has autonomy to determine which social identities predominate his self-concept.

Since the individual determines his most salient social identities, the individual engages an active role in determining group membership. The individual demonstrates group membership through the three following components: cognitive, evaluative, and emotional (Tajfel, 1978a). The cognitive component indicates mental awareness of group membership (Tajfel, 1978a). Everyone within a social identity group must have a psychological recognition of his group membership status. This component ensures there is a personal and voluntary investment in the group. Furthermore, individuals cannot be assigned to a social identity group by another person. The evaluative component reflects the positive or negative value to group membership (Tajfel, 1978a). Since group membership embraces a collectivistic experience, a single person considers his association based upon external evaluation. Although the evaluation is applied to the group, this evaluation is personalized to the individual's self-concept. Therefore, the individual desires a positive group appraisal because it presumes a positive individual evaluation. Lastly, the emotional component indicates a visceral connection to group membership and group members (Tajfel, 1978a). This component of social identity development comprises a combination of the evaluative and cognitive components. As a member of a group, the individual takes pride in embracing and associating with others' identity and the association with others sharing this identity. Also, the individual's emotional response to the group is rooted in his understanding of the group's external perception.

Since social identity is a component of self-concept, the development of group identities is essential to unpacking how individuals can be identified through group membership. Though everyone has a personal journey in embodying their self-identity, each social identity carries an expected experience and connotation for individuals within and outside a specific group. According to Brewer (2000), individuals should expect a common fate when sharing a common identity. Common fate suggests “a coincidence of outcomes among two or more persons that arises because they have been subjected to the same external forces or decision rules (Brewer, 2000, p. 118).” For example, two individual students (Student 1 and Student 2) who both come from a working-class family and attend an underserved secondary school might not be expected to achieve a college degree. Given their circumstances, Student 1 and Student 2 might lack adequate familial support from their respective families and sufficient academic resources to navigate the overall college experience. The similar factors of socioeconomic class and educational experiences might lead to a common outcome. However, Brewer (2000) indicates that social identity is not based on shared fate, which suggests interdependence between group members. Using the previous example, Student 1’s case could be changed so that this student receives a full-ride scholarship. In this case, Student 1 can focus primarily on academic work, but Student 2 might have to balance employment and academic work to navigate college. Consequently, these circumstances will alter both students’ experiences, but the change in financial support for Student 1 does not affect Student 2’s experience. Therefore, this example demonstrates how shared identity does not include a shared fate, but there is common fate expected due to both students being exposed to the same overarching conditions.

As social identities develop, individual groups form that are distinct according to specific attributes, experiences, or labels (Brewer, 2000). These qualities are essential to demarcate one group from another. As group members affirm their shared qualities, they implicitly refute qualities that do not typify the group. According to Tajfel and Turner (1979), this inherent comparison is necessary to determine how individual groups are different and establish worth over an out-group in some capacity. This process of differentiation provides a few possibilities for comparing in-groups and out-groups. Differentiation creates competition between groups in which one group has supremacy and control over another group. Also, differentiation establishes a sense of exclusivity in which one group appears more valuable than another group. Tajfel and Turner (1979) also describes three variables that affect intergroup differentiation: assimilation of group membership into each member's self-concept, reasonable social circumstances for group comparisons, and attributional relevance between in-groups and out-groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). For example, a reasonable intergroup comparison would be general college students and college student-athletes. Both groups share a common social setting in college and university campuses. Also, both groups share similar access to the college experience, such as on-campus living, academic classes, and social parties. However, the significant difference between these two groups is varsity athletic participation. Conversely, faculty members would not represent a comparable out-group to either college students or college student-athletes. Though faculty members share the common terrain of the campus environment, they lack relative access to college experiences, such as on-campus living, academic classes, and social parties. Given this premise,

establishing clear boundaries and qualities for group comparisons is consequential for social identity development and identifying relevant groups.

Intersectionality. Although social identity development occurs through messaging that the person has received and internalized, this process does not involve the person only embracing one social identity. The complexity of human experience leads us to embrace several social identities. However, some of the person's social identities will be more salient than others. Much of the research on multiple identities focuses on the oppression associated with social identities and how the person chooses to navigate their experiences based on their realities (Reynolds & Pope, 1991; Root, 1990). Reynolds and Pope (1991) developed the Multidimensional Identity Model, which proposed four ways in which someone navigates multiple identities: (1) embracing one social identity based on external perception, (2) embracing one social identity chosen by the self, (3) embracing multiple social identities in which one social identity is salient based on the setting, or (4) embracing multiple social identities with intentional integration to their self-concept. The person's consciousness of their social identities will dictate how they are situated within the Multidimensional Identity Model.

To advance this model, Jones, and McEwen (2000) established the conceptual model of multiple dimensions of identity. Through this model, a person can consider all social identities that represent their self-concept and determine the salience of each social identity. Within this model, the person has a core self within a web of social identities. Based on their experiences, the person will assign dots along the web pertinent to their social identities. Each dot signifies how salient each social identity is to the person's core self-concept. Therefore, the person can demonstrate which social identities are most

pervasive to their social presentation. To capture this notion, Abes, Jones, and McEwen (2007) revised the model to incorporate meaning making. Through this approach, the person can navigate how the environment informs their self-concept. Also, the interplay between the person and the environment suggests that one's self-concept might fluctuate according to ongoing messages that are both received and internalized (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007). As a result, this model affirmed previous research suggesting that the core self is shaped by intrapsychic and interpsychic processes (Deaux, 1993; Finley, 1997, as cited in Jones & McEwen, 2000). Ultimately, the core self might emphasize one social identity, but every person embraces several social identities. Therefore, understanding how one chooses to express their salient social identities will determine how they engage in their social context.

The notion of multiple identities converging for one experience is captured through the notion of intersectionality. According to Crenshaw (1991), intersectionality asserts that the combination of a person's social identities affects their lived experiences. Crenshaw's (1991) work focuses on the violence inflicted on women of color through patriarchal systems. However, their experiences of being battered, raped, and mistreated in relationships and various social structures are not exclusive to their identity as women. Instead, their experiences are connected their identities through race and class in which they have limited access to employment, wealth attainment, and housing (Crenshaw, 1991). Therefore, the patriarchal norms dominating women's empowerment along with discriminatory practices limiting social mobility access for Black people and working-class citizens compound to generate the lived realities of women of color who have been battered. Given this study's focus on multiple identities, Crenshaw's lens on

intersectionality is relevant to unpacking these student-athletes' experiences of transitioning into the world of work.

Crenshaw (1991) proposes the idea of structural intersectionality in which intervention strategies would need to consider a specific lens highlighting all relevant identities to address a certain issue. Therefore, all identities are considered so that the present issue is fully understood through a complete picture. The present study explores the transitional experiences of former Division 1 Black, male, first-generation college basketball and football student-athletes into the world of work. Since student-athletes represent the general population of this study, athletic identity would be presumed as the primary perspective for examining work transitions. However, Crenshaw (1991) would indicate the masculinity, Black identity, and first-generation status could not be divorced from grasping how this specific group of student-athletes transition into the world of work. As shown above, Black male basketball and football student-athletes face several challenges and limitations with navigating academic experiences, graduation outcomes, and career attainment. Therefore, exploring this issue of work transitions through the sole lens of athletic identity would be insufficient to capture the intersectional details contributing to the participants' lived reality.

Athletic identity. The critical concern about transitioning from competitive athletic play into the world of work is that student-athletes place significant emphasis on their athletic identity (Brewer, van Raalte, & Linder, 1993). The NCAA reports considerable time commitments for student-athletes, especially in Division 1 football and basketball, which poses significant challenges with balancing their involvement in athletic endeavors and non-athletic activities (Bimper, 2010; Chen, Snyder, & Wagner,

2014). According to Good, Brewer, Petitpas, van Raalte, and Mahar (1993), student-athletes are more likely to experience identity foreclosure, which suggests they are less open to exploring social identities aside from their athletic identity (Marcia, 1966). Additional research proposed that prolonged participation in competitive sports affects and can alter a person's self-identity, which advances the concern of identity foreclosure (Brewer, van Raalte, & Petitpas, 2000). Also, Lyons, Dorsch, Bell, and Mason (2018) discovered that high school student-athletes found popularity through sport participation given the excitement centered around sports. Due to the fandom surrounding Division 1 athletics, it is likely that the sentiments of popularity would extend into college sports. Furthermore, Hawley, Hosch, and Bovaird (2014) discovered that student-athletes experience a subculture in which they are segregated from the general student population. Consequently, student-athletes are reinforced by their athletic identity because they are unable to explore additional identities (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). Therefore, Division 1 student-athletes might become enmeshed with their athletic identity, which clouds any self-perception that does not involve athletics. While this notion does not suggest other social identities are unimportant, it seems clear that athletic identity might dictate the student-athlete college experience.

Given this background, Division 1 student-athletes face some significant challenges when considering academic outcomes. According to McQuown-Linnemeyer and Brown (2010), many student-athletes enter college with definitive academic and careers paths. Bjornsen and Dinkel (2017) interviewed coaches who indicated that student-athletes might experience more academic and career exploration by not forcing student-athletes to select a major before their sophomore year. With these expectations,

student-athletes are stifled with respect to exploring intrinsic interests. Instead, they are considering how athletic participation can be maintained without giving adequate time to non-athletic endeavors. Also, Huml, Hancock, and Hums (2019) found that a lower grade point average correlated to increased scores of the *exclusivity* subscale of the Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS), which indicates that sports were more salient in the person's life. Though athletic identity does not predict that students will experience academic struggles, there are additional considerations for how athletic identity affects academic experiences. Huang, Hung, and Chou (2016) found that a more salient athletic identity resulted in lower engagement of academic experiences. Furthermore, Otto (2015) reported that male student-athletes in basketball and football endure academic clustering, which means that they are enrolled in less rigorous and more flexible courses so that they meet academic standards without minimizing athletic commitments (Knight Commission, 2006). As a result, these practices might affect academic majors that student-athletes select and prioritize athletic goals over career possibilities (Foster & Huml, 2017). Overall, athletic identity can have immediate effects on student-athletes' college experience, which could yield deleterious effects in the future.

In addition to academic outcomes, athletic identity has been shown to affect career outcomes. According to Houle and Kluck (2015), athletic identity was shown to be a strong predictor of lower career maturity. Career maturity defines a person's preparedness to make career choices and fulfill the associated responsibilities (Savickas, 1984). Houle and Kluck (2015) found that Black student-athletes demonstrated lower career maturity than their White counterparts, which suggests the danger of an overemphasized athletic identity. Given the limited professional sports opportunities, this

finding illustrates the concern of Black student-athletes transitioning from competitive athletic play into the world of work. Also, it suggests that athletic identity overpowers attention to career preparation. In addition, Brown, Glastetter-Fender, and Shelton (2000) found that identity foreclosure predicted career decision-making self-efficacy, which reflects a person's confidence to make career-focused decisions (Taylor & Betz, 1983); however, athletic identity was negatively correlated to career decision-making self-efficacy. With an emphasis on athletic identity, student-athletes might focus on professional sport aspirations, which would reduce their career optimism for non-sport-related futures (Tyranee, Harris, & Post, 2013). In addition, career adaptability, which is a person's ability to navigate career changes, was shown to have an inverse relationship with athletic identity (Tyranee, Harris, & Post, 2013). Previous research has demonstrated that athletic identity affects preparation and readiness for career transitions, but it has not explored how athletic identity factors into decisions and career pursuits. Given the prominence of athletic participation for Division 1 student-athletes, the effects of athletic identity seem important to grasp student-athletes' transitional experiences from competitive athletic play into the world of work. This focus might unveil insight regarding the work environments in which former student-athletes feel they belong.

Masculinity. According to Stoller (1964, 1965, 1968), masculine gender identity is based on males dissociating from their mothers and creating an opposite identify to their fathers. Though the parents provide a foundation for the male's identity, his quest for identity development is based on a distinct identity separate from his parents. Furthermore, males based their sense of manhood on not embodying any feminine qualities (Diamond, 2006). Existing literature describes gender from a performative lens

in which certain behaviors are indicative of male and female tendencies. West and Zimmerman (1987) suggest that humans “[do] gender, [which] involves a complex of socially guided perceptual, interactional, and micropolitical activities that cast particular pursuits as expressions of masculine and feminine ‘natures’ (p. 126).” Though sexuality has a biological foundation, gender is deemed social and executed through actions. As a result, masculinity can be evaluated on certain benchmarks, which can affirm or discount one’s sense of manhood. West and Zimmerman (1987) suggest that gender performance is created and maintained through the following institutions: families, schools, sports, and media. Based upon messages received within these environments, males establish and reconstruct masculine norms and beliefs. These messages generate expectations for how boys and men approach their behavioral standards.

According to Huppatz (2016), gender is performed in a way so that gender and sexual identities are reinforced through repetitive behaviors. Through this process, gender assumes a fixed expression so that there are normed behaviors and any deviant actions from normed expectations stimulates wariness (Huppatz, 2016). Social expectations dictate which behaviors and dispositions are acceptable, which can influence how humans conduct themselves. Benjamin (1988) indicates that men are expected to be rational, protective, aggressive, protective, and dominant, whereas women are expected to be emotional, nurturing, receptive, and submissive. Therefore, people are confined to these behavioral boxes for social acceptance. As people mature, admissible behaviors evolve to fulfill masculine and feminine expectations. Diamond (2006) suggests manliness is epitomized by pain tolerance and sexual prowess during late adolescence and early adulthood. As adulthood progresses, manhood is evaluated by career success

and the ability to provide for the family (Diamond, 2006). Though the standards advance through the developmental stages, males are expected to assert consistent dominance and protectiveness. Without these salient themes, one's manliness is questioned or discredited.

Though masculinity evolves through human development, males receive specific messages regarding masculine identities during their undergraduate experience. To embody a masculine identity, college men learn to embrace competition, responsibility, authority roles, rule breaking, and aggression while rejecting emotionality, vulnerability, and feminine qualities (Edwards & Jones, 2009; Harris, 2010). These qualities assure that males can assert dominance over others and maintain composure. Furthermore, Black men might concede to social pressures suggesting that they disregard any academic inclinations to gain peer acceptance (Harris, 2018). Also, Harris (2010) discovered that some Black men conformed to traditional masculine behaviors because their fathers reinforced those behaviors. However, there are positive notions in which Black men identify masculine behaviors through leadership roles and academic success (Harris, Palmer, & Struve, 2011). Also, some Black men found that connections to other Black men generate space to share intimate emotions (McGuire, Berhanu, Davis, & Harper, 2014).

Black identity. Given the focus on Black male student-athletes, Black identity development is important to understanding how racial identity might be expressed. Cross's (1991) nigrescence theory established a means for understanding how Black identity development manifests. Specifically, this theory suggested that a Black person negotiated racial preference, which affected their mental health and self-identity (as cited

in Vandiver, Cross, Worrell, & Fhagen-Smith, 2002). The original nigrescence model proposed five stages of development; however, the revised model was condensed into the following four stages: Pre-Encounter, Encounter, Immersion-Emersion, and Internalization (as cited in Vandiver, Fhagen-Smith, Cokley, Cross, & Worrell, 2001; Vandiver et al., 2002). At the Pre-Encounter state, a person's connection to their Blackness is either non-existent or negative due to limited awareness or faulty views regarding Black identity. The Encounter stages encourages a person to re-evaluate their relationship with the Blackness given lived experiences that reinforce differences from a White racial identity. The third stage, Immersion-Emersion, involves a person having more contact with Black culture, which prompts more awareness and exploration of Black identity. The Internalization stage comprises the point at which a person integrates Black identity into their self-identity. Finally, the Internalization-Commitment stage indicates that the person has integrated their own sense of Black identity and developed motivation to active work in the struggles of Black people. These four stages represent groups in which specific identity types might emerge in terms of how one expresses Black identity.

After the revised nigrescence model was developed, there was an expansion in which cluster identities were established to capture different experiences and profiles underneath the following three stages: Pre-Encounter, Immersion-Emersion, and Internalization (as cited in Vandiver et al., 2001; Vandiver et al., 2002). Within the Pre-Encounter stage, there are three identities: Assimilation, Miseducation, and Self-Hatred. Assimilation describes individuals who supported pro-White ideologies and understandings of human experience. Miseducation defines individuals who internalize

negative labels ascribed to the Black community, whereas Self-Hatred termed individuals with negative self-perceptions based on their race. Within the Immersion-Emersion stage, there are two identities: Intense Black Involvement and Anti-White. Intense Black Involvement represents individuals who explored and embraced all activities connected to Black identity expression. On the other hand, Anti-White describes people who oppose and vilify White identity and culture. Lastly, the Internalization stage produced three identities: Black Nationalist, Biculturalist, and Multiculturalist. Black Nationalist describes persons who are engrossed with Black culture, empowerment, and independence. Biculturalist indicates individuals who embrace their racial and ethnic identities as Black and American, respectively. Multiculturalist defines persons who have internalized their Black identity while also giving similar acceptance to two or more other identities. Given these definitions and clusters, there are multiple categories in which Black people might situate their personal identity. Therefore, this study could access individuals who fit various identity profiles suggested by the nigrescence model.

Despite the diversity in the Black experience, it is quite likely that this study would gain insight from individuals embracing an Internalization Multiculturalist identity. According to Bimper, Harrison, and Clark (2012), Black student-athletes indicated that they embraced complex identities due to their Black identity have equal important as their athletic identity in their experience. Specifically, Black men have faced doubts and micro-aggressions from peers suggesting that their college admission was due to affirmative action or athletic ability rather than their intellect (Harris, Palmer, & Struve, 2011). As a result, pressure for academic excellence was heightened because there was a striving to challenge stereotypes and create new narrative regarding Black

men and their achievement capabilities (Bimper et al., 2012). Given this approach to Black identity development, Black male student-athletes are unable to divorce their racial identity from their athletic identity in their experiences. Instead, their experiences are intersectional. While this study prioritizes athletic identity as the focus, additional identities, especially Black identity, might affect the narratives and findings that will be uncovered.

First-generation College Experience

Though Black male student-athletes have been explored through previous research, there is not much research that explores the nuances of first-generation status within student-athlete populations. Despite this limitation, there exists a wealth of research regarding the first-generation college student experience that would frame potential considerations for student-athletes. Previous research has shown that almost 27% of entering college students identify as first generation (Choy, 2001). Also, first-generation students are four times less likely to complete college (Engle & Tinto, 2008) with 43% of these students not earning a degree (Chen, 2005). Oftentimes, first-generation college students come from low-income backgrounds, which affects college degree attainment. Specifically, Hodges-Payne (2006) cites that low-income families focus much of their attention on earning money, which dilutes how they might value higher education. Furthermore, first-generation students often earn income to finance school, which leads to working more hours than continuing-generation and dropping out of school by their second year (Prospero & Vohra-Gupta, 2007). With these competing interests, first-generation college students are unable to devote adequate attention to their

academic studies. In addition, they are often facing several challenges beyond financial constraints, which complicates their lived experience.

Prior to entering college, first-generation students encounter obstacles that affect their academic and career outcomes. According to Cuyjet (1997), Black male students lack sufficient academic development due to underperforming primary and secondary institutions, lower expectations of academic skills, and limited access to resources. The deficits produced through these experiences are merely compounded when these students also have first-generation status. Consequently, ethnic minority first-generation college students are often ill-equipped to navigate their college experiences (Richardson & Skinner, 1992). Examples of their lacking abilities include limited academic skills, such as critical thinking, and general college experiences, such as financial obligations and time management (Thayer, 2000; Willett, 1989). These skills are important to students feeling self-sufficient and being able to balance several responsibilities. However, first-generation college students may not have access to environments in which they could develop these skills. Also, first-generation students are often learning information about college without their immediate family's help because they lack tangible experiences to transmit (York-Anderson & Bowman, 1991). Therefore, first-generation college students may not understand the commitment and individual efforts needed to have a successful college experience (Brooks-Terry, 1988). In particular, first-generation Black male students experience challenges with career development and exploration due to lacking exposure to the college environment (Hertel, 2002). Given the limited firsthand knowledge, first-generation college students are often encountering culture shocks during the initial years of their college experience. Furthermore, Black male students are a

subset of the first-generation population that face numerous complications with navigating experiences during and beyond college.

In addition to navigating new environments, first-generation students are negotiating their cultural disposition. Since first-generation students lack immediate relatives who have completed college, they are enduring novel experiences that are unfamiliar to their household. Thus, first-generation college students are navigating how they will exist within two cultural settings: home and college (Hsaio, 1992; Mitchell, 1997). Specifically, Covarrubias and Fryberg (2015) explored achievement guilt and found that first-generation college students often feel remorse about earning a college education and surpassing the achievement levels of their family. This concern breeds challenges with college persistence as first-generation college students do not want to become disconnected from their families. As a result, continuing academic endeavors while helping their family navigate current struggles decreases their sense of guilt (Covarrubias & Fryberg, 2015), which might allow them to continue their academic pursuits. While maintaining connections to home might override achievement guilt, first-generation college students often are navigating their individual identity. Stephens, Fryberg, Markus, Johnson, and Covarrubias (2012) discovered that more universities would be typified as spaces reinforce individualistic norms. However, many first-generation college students uphold more collectivistic values, which creates a mismatch upon college entrance (Stephens et al., 2012). Therefore, first-generation college students encounter several challenges with persistence and success.

As shown, the development and backgrounds of first-generation college students project several issues with college expectations, academic skills, socialization, and self-

esteem (Hicks, 2003). However, there are remedies that suggest their academic and career fates will not be predestined. According to Astin (1993) and Tinto (1993), peer connections are significant with respect to first-generation college students making successful academic adjustments. Since first-generation college students do not have firsthand information about college, peer relationships position them to acquire necessary information and resources to succeed. Furthermore, these peer relationships might help first-generation students become more engaged in their college experience. Hidi and Harackiewicz (2000) indicated that students who encountered any disadvantages demonstrated less motivation in their academic endeavors. As a result, decreased motivation will influence academic and career outcomes. However, high self-efficacy in education increased academic performance (Majer, 2009) and promoted persistence (Wright, Jenkins-Guarnieri, & Murdock, 2012) for first-generation college students. While research specific to first-generation student-athletes is limited, Ortagus and Merson (2015) discovered that building meaningful connections with faculty members yielded more academic success for this population.

Belongingness

General overview. According to Maslow (1954), humans have a basic psychological need for belonging. Baumeister and Leary (1995) advanced this notion to suggest that belongingness is an intrinsic need of human beings to develop and sustain relationships with other people. This principle coincides with identity formation in that humans find connection with others who share similar identities. Belongingness is contingent upon the person having recurrent interaction with another person or a specific group and feelings that the connection will be maintained with mutual interest over time

(Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Furthermore, Baumeister and Leary (1995) suggest the belongingness is solidified once the person internalizes that the other person or group shows admiration and genuine concern for their well-being. Without the person having individual worth in the group, their allegiance will be insufficient to establish a sense of belonging. Although belongingness is a fundamental human striving, there is a point of satiation in which a person no longer pursues a new relationship because they feel connected (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Also, Baumeister and Leary (1995) cite that some people might rekindle old relationships when newer bonds do not suffice their belongingness desires. Therefore, the human instinct involves a process of seeking enough relationships so that they feel their existence matters.

Given this need to belong, Hirsch and Clark (2019) indicate four pathways that humans pursue to developing a sense of belongingness: the communal-relationship path, the general-approbation path, the group-membership path, and the minor-sociability path. The communal-relationship path suggests that each person has mutual interest in the other person's well-being without reservations or grudges related to the connection (Hirsch & Clark, 2019). These relationships involve elevated levels of vulnerability and trust, which reinforce the connection (Clark, Beck, & Aragón, 2018). The general-approbation path indicates that people establish a sense of belonging through adulation in which their idiosyncrasies and insecurities are hidden (Hirsch & Clark, 2019). Instead, acceptance regardless of the cost is important (Hirsch & Clark, 2019) because it is a contingency for self-worth (Cialdini et al., 1976). The group-membership path reflects the notion of group belongingness due to sharing similar identities to group members (Hirsch & Clark, 2019). In addition, belongingness is facilitated by sharing similar

interests with group members (Easterbrook & Vignoles, 2013) or being liked by other group members (Hunter et al., 2017). Lastly, Hirsch and Clark (2019) describe the minor-sociability path as brief interactions with others in which there are amiable exchanges between all parties. While these interactions might occur numerous times, the extent of the relationships are not consequential for the persons involved, yet they generate happiness and connection (Sandstrom & Dunn, 2013; Sandstrom & Dunn, 2014). As a result, belongingness can be generated in several ways, which empowers individual meaning to describe a person's connection to environments in which they feel their presence should matter.

Belongingness among college students. This notion is supported by Strayhorn (2019) who defines belongingness, especially within college populations, as a person's sense of social support, connection with others, mattering to others, and value to the campus environment. As a result, belongingness is essential to students' desire to complete or discontinue higher educational pursuits (Strayhorn, 2019). Research has indicated that college students with a greater sense of belonging have shown elevated levels of academic self-confidence, academic motivation, academic adjustment, and overall achievement (Freeman, Anderman, & Jensen, 2007; Murphy & Zirkel, 2015; Ostrove & Long, 2007; Pittman & Richmond, 2007; Walton & Cohen, 2011). Also, according to Suhlmann, Sassenberg, Nagengast, and Trautwein (2018), belongingness was shown to increase well-being and academic motivation while decreasing students' desire to not finish their degree. While belongingness might have individual meanings and pathways, college students have demonstrated more positive outcomes when they feel connected in their college environments. On an intrapersonal level, students who

faced adversity, yet had high perceptions of self-worth and independence had a sense of “feeling at home” (Fulmer et al., 2010; Stephens, Brannon, Markus, & Nelson, 2015). However, first-generation college students experience financial adversity, which might affect self-worth in terms of college affordability (Duffy et al., 2020). In the academic sense, students who interacted with faculty and participated in academic activities outside of class showed a higher sense of belongingness (Strayhorn, 2019). Also, students with a higher sense of belonging also achieved higher grade point averages (Anderman, 2002; Faircloth & Hamm, 2005; Murphy & Zirkel, 2015). Among first-generation college students, Duffy et al. (2020) discovered that a sense of belonging in one’s academic discipline promoted greater college persistence. Therefore, intrapsychic factors and academic performance are critical factors when considering one’s perception of belongingness. However, belongingness has a relational component that ensures college student’s retention and completion of college studies.

In addition to academic performance, academic support programs and faculty attention on student growth were factors that showed value in students’ sense of belongingness (Maestas et al., 2007). Cole, Newman, and Hypolite (2019) explored the experiences of students who participated in a college transition program and found that staff concerns about student well-being and academic performance through grade checks fostered a positive sense of belonging. These factors offer emotional and physical evidence that students have institutional support to help them navigate their college experience. Furthermore, faculty are consequential in empowering and welcoming students to validate their presence on college campuses (Hurtado, Alvarado, & Guillermo-Wann, 2015). According to Kim and Sax (2009), faculty connections in

research endeavors facilitate higher academic grade point average and degree pursuits. While faculty members and institutional staff are merely a portion of the college experience, students have greater achievement outcomes with faculty support. Also, faculty connections seem to nurture a greater sense of belonging because they monitor students' development during the college experience.

In addition to faculty bonds, students are often surrounded by diverse groups of peers who might hold social identities that are quite different from their own. According to Easterbrook and Vignoles (2013), belongingness shows a positive correlation to intragroup similarity, which suggests the importance of building relationships with people holding similar values and beliefs. Strayhorn (2019) discovered that belongingness increased when students were involved in extra-curricular endeavors, such as clubs and organizations, sports, and recreational activities. Through these activities, students have opportunities to learn more about their peers and exchange values that are important to them. Cole, Newman, and Hypolite (2019) found that belongingness increased when social interactions with topics like religion, politics, diversity, and personal values occurred. Through interactions such as these, students can share personal and intimate views that would allow others to develop more appreciation of their perspectives and experiences. Furthermore, students might build new connections or determine whether their peers value their presence (Cole, Newman, & Hypolite, 2019). Within first-generation student groups, Nguyen and Herron (2020) found that some students spent more money on social outings, technological items, and academic materials so that they could assimilate to their friend groups, which increased their sense

of belonging. Therefore, social connections manifested through interactions or materialism might help college students reinforce their worth to the college campus.

While belongingness is important to college success, White students have reported a higher sense of belongingness compared to students of color due to interpersonal and cultural differences, institutional support for students of color, and the novel experience of college (Johnson et al., 2007; Museus & Maramba, 2011). Previous research has shown that the institutional culture of many colleges often projects an image that is not representative or inclusive of the Black experience, which breeds isolation and ostracism (Rawls & David, 2006). Oftentimes, students of color, especially those with first-generation status, experienced more discrimination on college campuses (Garriott, 2019). Furthermore, research has shown Black male students as being highly surveilled based on their identity, which has heightened feelings of isolation (as cited in Brooms, 2018). Therefore, Black students face compounding challenges beyond the expected adjustments of transitioning into college. Black students wrestle with concerns of whether their presence is valued and appreciated on college campuses. However, participation in ethnic affinity groups have shown to promote smoother adjustments to college and a greater sense of belonging for Black students (Museus, 2008). Brooms (2018) found that Black male students participating in Black Male Initiative (BMI) programs helped with growing social networks, gaining more insight about the institution, and identifying more resources. Also, Black male students felt that BMI programs generated all-around support in which they could receive genuine care related to their professional development, emotional well-being, interpersonal development, and intrapersonal development

(Brooms, 2018). Although Black students face many challenges and obstacles during their college experience, they can navigate their experiences through social peer groups.

In addition to peer groups, institutional support for Black students is significant in their college success. Kitchen and Williams (2019) found that belongingness for Black students is influenced by institutional engagement, which comprises campus-led enrichment activities (Kuh, 2009). Student-faculty relationships that involved holistic development, such as career planning or student-faculty engagement beyond academic work, were significant predictors of belongingness for Black students (Kitchen & Williams, 2019). Also, Kitchen and Williams (2019) discovered that academic resources and campus engagement generated by the institution stimulated an increased sense of belonging for Black students. Therefore, these students felt that the institution was intentional about devising activities and structures to facilitate more connection with them. Specifically, Black students felt more academically and socially engaged when their campus environment validated their cultural identity in both academic and non-academic spaces (Beasley, 2020). Activities, such as TRIO programs and college readiness programs, are significant factors in belongingness for Black male students; however, Black male students feel more supported and connected at HBCU's compared to PWI's (as cited in "Factors Critical to the Access and Success of Black Men in Postsecondary Education," 2014). Also, Beasley (2020) found that faculty showing genuine care increased Black students' desire to connect with them.

Belongingness among college student-athletes. Consequently, each person is striving to generate relationships with which to identify and establish meaning. For student-athletes, this process is actualized within a team, which functions as its own

community. Individual student-athletes can create bonds with their teammates and coaches through athletic participation. Student-athletes might forge relationships with the larger college campus population and community members. Given the experiences of Division 1 football and basketball athletes, the sense of belongingness might be tied to consistent contact with team members. Also, belongingness is captured within the campus population due to the environment and excitement surrounding the football and basketball teams. Furthermore, belongingness can be a means of connecting with the larger fan community consisting of both local and global fans.

Previous research focused on belongingness within athletic contexts has been limited; however, the findings have demonstrated the value of sports for participants. From a recreational perspective, belongingness mediated the relationship between an athletic participant's harmonious passion and positive emotions but did not mediate the relationship between obsessive passion and positive emotions (Stenseng, Forest, & Curran, 2015). Vallerand, et al. (2003) defines harmonious passion as activity engaged through the person's free choice and autonomy, whereas obsessive passion involves activity that is chosen by a person but based on contingencies. Despite the presence of positive emotions, the athlete needs to demonstrate autonomous passion for belongingness to emerge. When the passion is internalized through external pressures, a sense of belonging to the sport or team structure seems minimal or nonexistent. This research does not engage how belongingness functions within a team structure; however, it presents inferences of how belongingness manifests for student-athletes.

Belongingness research in collegiate athletics has emphasized the student-athlete's connection to his or her respective campus rather than the athletic team. Gayles,

Crandall, and Morin (2018) indicated revenue-generating Division 1 student-athletes reported less belongingness to their university or college campus than non-revenue-generating Division 1 student-athletes. Furthermore, black student-athletes and male student-athletes reported less belongingness to their university or college campus than white student-athletes and female student-athletes, respectively (Gayles, Crandall, & Morin, 2018). These findings suggest different levels of campus integration for student-athletes. Specifically, Division 1 student-athletes who are members of revenue-generating sports and identify as black and male embody identities that are likely to reflect lower levels of campus belongingness. In addition, strong athletic identity is related to a lower sense of campus belonging (Gayles, Crandall, & Morin, 2018). Due to the athletic demands of Division 1 revenue-generating student-athletes, there are fewer opportunities for campus integration. Though this research explored campus belongingness, these findings might suggest team belongingness is more pronounced among Division 1 revenue-generating black male student-athletes.

Van Rheenen, McNeil, Minjares, and Atwood (2013) explored belongingness for Division 1 student-athletes through loss. Though this research was not a direct analysis of team belongingness, the findings offer important implications to consider for the present study. Within this study, the student-athletes were undergoing a loss of athletic identity due to their athletic programs being eradicated (Van Rheenen et al., 2013). For these student-athletes, athletic participation was a key factor in their decision to attend the institution. Therefore, the eradication of their sport programs posed concerns and challenges. Specifically, some student-athletes indicated identity loss and abandonment as responses to their sport program's dissolution (Van Rheenen et al., 2013). This change

eliminated an important identity and altered their purpose for attending the institution. The eventual change resulted in student-athletes thinking they were personifying a falsehood because they did not belong to an existing team. Furthermore, the student-athletes could not see themselves as regular students because they did not embrace this identity (Van Rheenen et al., 2013). For these student-athletes, their athletic teams seemed to meet their belongingness need, but the dissolution of their athletic program created a void. However, these relationships were not easy to replace because the most desirable relationships involved athletic connections. The student-athletes studied in this research demonstrate their high affinity for their sport and team. Despite the campus culture, Division 1 student-athletes seem to satisfy their need to belong within athletic circles. These findings further indicate that student-athletes have rare connections that are meaningful outside of athletics. Therefore, this notion questions whether former-athletes would establish belongingness in work environments that are not sport-related.

Work Transition Experiences

Given the incongruence between available professional athletic playing careers and aspirations for these careers, most student-athletes will need to transition into alternative routes to obtain a career. According to Louis (1980), a career transition is a stage in which a person changes a position or changes the relationship to a specific position. Given the current advancements in the world of work, Chudzikowski (2012) indicated careers have become fluid whereby stability is uncommon, and transitions are expected in a person's career trajectory. Though careers transitions are now commonplace, Division 1 college football and basketball student-athletes experience challenges with their post-college futures because they often exhibit higher levels of

athletic identity, which increases their desires to pursue sport-related careers despite the limited number of jobs (Cabrita, Rosado, Leite, Serpa, & Sousa, 2014). Therefore, student-athletes often struggle to envision themselves in other environments that do not include sports (Leonard & Schimmel, 2016). As a result, concerns arise regarding whether student-athletes are equipped to make smooth transitions into the world of work once competitive athletic play ends.

There are several factors contributing to how people transition into different work environments. Previous research has shown that person-environment fit is positively correlated to well-being and motivation, which being negatively correlated to dropout desires (Chatman, 1989; Edwards & Shipp, 2007; Kristof, 1996). If an individual connects with their work environment, they are likely to maintain reliable performance and continue in their work role. Stephens, Fryberg, Markus, Johnson, and Covarrubias (2012) found that person-environment fit contributed to tasks seeming less difficult for the worker. Therefore, the connection between the worker and the work environment will facilitate more work self-efficacy and encourage the person to perform their job duties at a high level. However, Verbruggen and de Vos (2020) found that career desires do not always align with a person's career trajectory, which means that people are fulfilling work roles that do not support their career aspirations. Since work transitions are frequent within the world of work, career inaction is possible, which suggests that a person wants to change careers and can make a career transition but decides not to pursue the career change (Verbruggen & de Vos, 2020). Furthermore, Verbruggen and de Vos (2020) expressed that career inaction is probable if one or more of the following factors are part of the process: the career change is undefined, the transition will bring significant change

in the person's life, the timeframe in which to enact the career change is unclear, or the person feels enmeshed with their current job context. While student-athletes are not considered workers, their roles as student-athletes parallel work environments in which they feel competent and connected. However, they may not feel capable of pursuing non-athletic endeavors even if their athletic playing careers are ending. Therefore, transitioning into the world of work might generate adjustment difficulties because student-athletes do not feel equipped to navigate all work transitions.

High school to work transition. Though this study aimed to explore experiences of former college student-athletes, their development towards careers started before entering college. Therefore, relevant literature regarding the experiences of high school students regarding work and work transitions was important to consider. Previous research shows that career ascension and development can be marked by six different processes: training, experimenting, stabilizing, drifting, floundering, and stagnating (Savickas, 1999). Savickas (1999) described training as preparation for work through education and internship experiences, experimenting as transitioning from one position to a related position given one's passions, and stabilizing as solidifying a permanent role. Conversely, drifting is the unreasoned shift from one position to another, floundering marks dissatisfactory work performance or moving into an unfit position, and stagnating describes unintentional limiting of career evolution by remaining in an unfit position longer than necessary (Savickas, 1999). While every person's career trajectory varies, Savickas (1999) noted Donald Super's 1942 Career Pattern Study indicated career stabilization was marked by ability, interest, and academic achievement. Previous research showed boys are more prone to consider their subject-specific aptitude, show

interest in jobs where they are talented, and prioritize good wages and job security when constructing their career plans (Borg, 1996). Therefore, career possibilities could be influenced by several factors, including initial insight that one gathers about careers, especially during high school.

According to Ruhm (1995), high school students who have jobs yielded greater financial outcomes than those who did not have jobs during high school. While this expectation may not be feasible for all high school students, the exposure to careers shapes how one might approach the transition from school to work. Swanson and Fouad (1999) noted that vocational choice is a process that begins before the work transition and persists beyond the initial entry into the workforce. Furthermore, theoretical literature, especially social cognitive career theory, synthesizes work transitions as a progressive journey that endures well into one's career (Lent, Hackett, & Brown, 1999). Given this understanding, high school represents an impressionable for a person's future career trajectory. Lent, Hackett, and Brown's (1999) research established that factors, such as environmental limitations or focused engagement in activities of keen aptitude, might narrow career options because this approach sets unrealistic outcome expectations and imbalances self-efficacy. The proposed approach from previous literature centered a developmental orientation so that elementary, middle, and high school students acquire healthy self-efficacy practices, form reasonable outcome beliefs, and do not prematurely foreclose options (Lent, Hackett, & Brown, 1999).

As a result, previous literature emphasized the value of openness and exploration to ease the school-to-work transition. In particular, the concepts of looking ahead and looking around were proposed as these approaches generated proficiency in the following

domains: (1) self-knowledge, (2) occupational information, (3) decision making, (4) planning, and (5) problem solving (Savickas, 1999). Given this perspective, previous research has illustrated the value of looking ahead and looking around. Powell and Luzzo (1998) studied high school students who showed that greater career maturity for career decision making led to an increased sense of control. Savickas (1999) indicated the adjustment to the school-to-work transition process is eased if someone was aware of career choices and consequential details for these choices when they were in high school. Also, the school-to-work transition process would be best facilitated by equal valuation of fit work environments and students developing relevant employment skills and self-knowledge (Swanson & Fouad, 1999). Ultimately, high school sets the foundation for future career possibilities because some of the fundamental beliefs about careers are formed.

College to work transition. While high school might set the foundation for career possibilities, the trend for the college to work transition might not be fixed. Instead, this foundation informs how one might engage in the college to work transition process. According to Ashforth & Saks (1995), work-role transition theory proposed that previous experience influences how one adjusts to a new work role. These experiences can shape how someone enters a new role because they have an idea of expectations and beliefs about their fitness with a particular job. Additionally, the research showed that people required both role development, which involves the role aligning with a person, and personal development, which includes the person meeting the role's expectations (Ashforth & Saks, 1995). Furthermore, these developmental attributes were achieved through discretion, which is one's ability to implement different strategies to adjust to a

role, and novelty, which is the lack of necessity to have previous knowledge, skills, and abilities (Ashforth & Saks, 1995). Given this framework, the college to work transition was influenced by exposure to jobs and awareness of expectations.

Previous research showed that students who had parental support for career planning would rely on their feedback and influences to shape their careers (Borg, 1996). In particular, there was a study conducted on college undergraduates who felt their career paths would mirror those within their radius of relationships. Findings from this research indicated that their sense of labor market desirability was contingent upon the work experiences that family members, friends, media, and peers projected (Buckham, 1998). Furthermore, there were beliefs that careers were linear and limited insight about work expectations, which bred negative views and a sense of low desirability within the labor market (Buckham, 1998). Furthermore, previous research illustrated that a shortsighted view of careers can affect career prospects, but there is not much research to account for these experiences. According to Herr (1999), career theories have primarily considered individuals who have actively engaged in career planning and possess even a small semblance of their career path. However, career theories have not included individuals with limited opportunities, lacking mentorship, or information gaps, which makes them susceptible to accepting perceived available jobs due to reduced exploration (Herr, 1999). This perspective is important considering the population of former Division 1 Black, male, first-generation college basketball and football student-athletes. Their experiences predispose them to not fitting the traditional lens for the school to work transition process.

Transitional experiences of college students. Given the commonality of work transitions, college students are expected to encounter several transitions as they navigate their early careers. However, the initial transition can be the most challenging because their setting and expectations are shifting. Reitz, Shrout, Denissen, Dufner, and Bolger (2019) discovered that transitioning from college into the world of work can weaken self-esteem because stability is disrupted in the process. The college experience provides some stability and structure with respect to course scheduling and academic requirements. However, transitioning into the world of work breeds uncertainty because there is no set blueprint for the career path that a person should follow. For college students, they might face challenges with respect to deciding on a career path and could benefit from additional guidance as they navigate their transition. According to Workman (2015), college students indicated that their parents and family held significant, yet variant, roles in their career decision-making process. College students typically described their parents and family as supportive, but they also reported feeling pressure or neutral support from their family (Workman, 2015). While career decisions are made by the individual person, college students might be balancing individual desires and collective desires. In the case of first-generation college students, they often lack adequate support with navigating career development since they are trailblazers in their pursuit of higher education (Tate et al., 2015). As a result, these factors might complicate how decisions are made about career choices. Naidoo, Bowman, Gerstein (1998) explored transitional experiences of Black college students and found that home and family were salient factors that were prioritized over work. This consideration illustrated decisions about career options were made with respect to how family and home

involvement would be affected. As a result, career maturity can be influenced by the importance of work to the person's values and personal identity (Naidoo et al., 1998).

In addition to personal values, individual development and skills are considerable factors in the feelings that college students have about their career transitional process. Yang and Gysbers (2007) found that college students experienced more psychological distress regarding career search self-efficacy when they lacked readiness, confidence, and support for career transitioning. For some college students, career planning might be affected by challenges with academic studies or interest. As a result, the lack of engagement might influence how college students feel about their ability to endure the transition from school into work. Among college men, Oliffe et al. (2010) found that subpar academic performance and shortcomings in career goals made college men more susceptible to depression. Although a person's professional career tenure might last several decades, the inability to fulfill one's career aspirations can be discouraging. However, more exposure to careers can prepare college students to navigate their career transition with more certainty. Kezar, Hypolite, and Kitchen (2020) found that career self-efficacy increased for first-generation students when they participated in a college transition program, which included mentorship, staff-initiated programming, and career development activities. Furthermore, confidence in career search self-efficacy despite one's anxiety would still translate to readiness for career transitioning (Yang & Gysbers, 2007). As a result, facilitating greater self-efficacy for college students might help them make sound career decisions, which could lead to more fulfillment in the workplace.

While career self-efficacy and external support are important to successful career exploration and decision-making, the individual profiles and voices of college students

are consequential to whether college students transition into a suitable work environment. Specifically, work engagement is important because this factor would reinforce the person's perception of being able to fulfill the job requirements (Bayl-Smith & Griffin, 2015). Furthermore, Bayl-Smith and Griffin (2015) indicate that identifying the person's work style might be more important to a successful work transition compared to person-environment fit. These findings emphasize the value of knowing the individual person's visions for their work environment, which include skills and interpersonal expectations. Owens, Lacey, Rawls, and Holbert-Quince (2010) indicated that career development can be strengthened for first-generation Black men through professionals hearing their experiences and perspectives related to desirable career roles and work environments. In particular, Black men can make informed career decisions and pursue alternative fields, if helping professionals warn them about workplace racism and discrimination they might experience in certain disciplines (Naidoo et al., 1998; Owens et al., 2010). Also, exploring career options from a social cognitive theory lens might be another way to capture individual experiences so that their career desires align with their interests, self-efficacy beliefs, career expectations, and personal goals (Olson, 2014). Kezar et al. (2020) found that individualized support for first-generation college students would allow them to consider unique qualities that contribute to their career search process. Olson (2014) suggested that first-generation students experience unplanned events and participate in informal activities that build skills relevant to future work endeavors. Given this perspective, there are additional factors that career-transitioning college students might consider in their career decision-making process so that their individual profile aligns with their future work environment.

Transition experiences of college student-athletes. According to Wylleman and Lavallee (2004), student-athletes engage four types of developmental transitions: athletic, psychological, psychosocial, and academic/vocational. Given these variant transitional domains, student-athletes might face unique challenges with transitioning. Due to multiple variables of the transitional process, student-athletes are tasked with navigating concerns about coping, social support, and practical activity engagement. Warehime, Dinkel, and Bjornsen-Ramig and Blount (2017) indicated former student-athletes experienced more life control, more well-roundedness, increased self-care practices, improved nutrition, and more friends. Student-athletes' awareness of being cared for by others prompted better transitional experiences (Brown, Webb, Robinson, & Cotgreave, 2018). Additional factors for transitioning included the student-athletes' motivation, institutional support during college, guidance from former student-athletes, and information on professional roles (Cummins & O'Boyle, 2015). Given the transitional process, student-athletes who engaged preemptive practices for transitioning felt this approach contributed to a smoother process (Brown et al., 2018; Cummins & O'Boyle, 2015). Since many Division 1 student-athletes hold expectations of establishing professional athletic careers, this preparatory behavior seems unlikely. Therefore, this specific practice seems important to explore among first-generation college student-athletes because they lack immediate connections to people who navigated college and career experiences by their degree.

In addition, student-athletes' college experiences were important to how they navigated their time in college and time after terminating their athletic careers. A nuanced factor influencing these experiences included the sport's profile level. Gayles and Hu

(2009) engaged the first-year Division 1 student-athletes who showed that low-profile student-athletes connected more with non-athletic peers and cited more attunement with cultural attitudes and values than high-profile student-athletes. Furthermore, this study concluded involvement in educationally purposeful activities, such as faculty interactions and student organizations, resulted in greater self-concept, learning skills, and communication skills (Gayles & Hu, 2009). Though this approach considered the significance of sport, there is further variability to consider. For example, all Division 1 institutions might not operate under the same guise in which basketball players are considered high-profile sports. Therefore, contextualization warrants consideration when determining whether an athletic team can be identified as high profile with respect to its campus community. Since high profile might be subjective terminology, concrete definitions need to be established to determine whether this language can be used to delineate athletic programs. Furthermore, the concept of high profile can be further unpacked to communicate how this terminology applies to student-athletes. Though student-athletes might participate in a high-profile sport or be members of a high-profile team, the student-athlete's individual status might differ. Therefore, a student-athlete not being considered as a prominent athlete for various reasons.

Beyond the factors contributing to student-athletes' transitional experiences, previous research has considered the types of support available to student-athletes during within-career transitions. Adams, Coffee, and Lavalley (2015) discovered parents, coaches, and teammates are sources of support with coaches being the highest support provider. Furthermore, emotional, esteem, informational, and tangible support were the types of support identified with emotional support surfacing as the most available support

type (Adams et al., 2015). Therefore, student-athletes desired encouraging responses while enduring challenging transitions and indicated coaches provided the most support. Though this data shows the sources and types of support most available, the student-athletes did not discuss the effectiveness and value of this support. Nonetheless, student-athletes seek social support from trusted parties, which could also include mentors and former teammates, to help them effectively navigate career transitions (Carter-Francique, Hart, & Steward, 2013). As a result, student-athletes might not feel reliable information comes from individuals who have not lived their experience or do not share a strong relationship with them.

In terms of student-athletes' perspectives, there are challenges with navigating career transitions because athletics dominates the student-athlete experience. Porter (2019) explored football student-athletes and discovered that their athletic participation limited academic experiences, which resulted in increased desires for futures involving football. Navarro and McCormick (2017) examined Division 1 football student-athletes who indicated that they had insufficient engagement in career development activities, which did not foster adaptive career transitioning. Despite these challenges, research has also shown that student-athletes can exhibit high career optimism and career decision-making self-efficacy, but only when pursuing sport-related careers (Cabrita, Rosado, Leite, Serpa, & Sousa, 2014). These findings emphasize the importance of student-athletes getting involved in non-athletic activities and engaging practical work experiences so that they can envision themselves in alternative roles and experience smoother transitions into novel work environments (Leonard & Schimmel, 2016). Given these challenges, student-athletes might feel incompetent with respect to transitioning

into the world of work, which engenders a sense of feeling lost. According to Russell, Cottingham, Barry, Lee, and Walsh (2018), student-athletes often engage in emotion-focused coping strategies when they endure the transitional process, which results in feeling inadequate, self-blaming, and feeling anxious. As a result, it seems the athletic commitment for Division 1 basketball and football student-athletes hinders any viable opportunity to develop adaptive strategies for transitioning into the world of work.

In addition to student-athlete perspectives, there are supporting personnel that could offer valuable support in student-athletes' transition into the world of work.

Previous literature has explored thoughts regarding the transitional experience regarding needed resources, current practices, and preparatory activities. According to Bjornsen and Dinkel (2017), Division 1 coaches were satisfied with the interpersonal and institutional practices for helping student-athletes transition. To prepare for transitioning, surveyed coaches reported employable skills training, life skills discussions from coaches, and a phase system should be implemented (Bjornsen & Dinkel, 2017). This insight is consistent with existing research suggesting early preparatory methods. However, student-athletes have cited that they do not feel they have active roles in career exploration and decision-making (Navarro & McCormick, 2017). For basketball and football student-athletes, significant athletic participation might reinforce more emphasis on athletic identity despite their dual identity as a student and a sport competitor.

Although different institutional and programmatic structures might be created for student-athletes, the support from athletic personnel might determine whether student-athletes access available resources. Since they spend extended periods with student-athletes, coaches and athletic personnel might be important catalysts for student-athlete career

development (Navarro & McCormick, 2017). Consequently, the roles of college sport personnel might need to extend beyond the athletic setting so that student-athletes experience positive outcomes regardless of whether they achieve sport-related futures.

Chapter 3: Method

Design

Given the previous research, there were limited studies on the transitional experiences of student-athletes. Previous research explores some different lenses: (1) how mental health professionals have helped student-athletes navigate their transition from competitive athletic play (Leonard & Schimmel, 2016; van Raalte et al., 2017), (2) what factors are important in the transitional process (Cummins & O'Boyle, 2015), (3) how student-athletes feel about their ability to navigate their career change and transitional experience (Burns et al., 2013; Houle & Kluck, 2015; Huang et al., 2016; McQuown-Linnemeyer & Brown, 2010). While these areas were necessary and important, little research unpacked the student-athletes' views and explanations behind their transitional experiences. There was also limited research on what student-athletes believe they need or think would be helpful to making a successful transition. The student-athletes' voices were somewhat hidden with respect to how they arrived at their career path based on their collegiate experiences. Furthermore, previous research explores student-athletes during their transitions, but has not considered their perspectives once they have entered the world of work (Brown et al., 2018). Lastly, previous research has not considered differences in student-athletes' transitions from competitive athletic play to the world of work based on specific work roles they fulfilled. As a result, the case study research design seemed most appropriate because these unique factors could be explored to offer different considerations for how student-athletes might prepare for the world of work during their collegiate experiences.

Specifically, this study implemented an embedded single-case design, which means that the research had a multi-level focus. According to Yin (2018), the embedded single-case design set the primary focus on the individual case, which is the first level. Then, the research gained depth through focusing on the case's subunits of analysis, which is the second level. At the first level, this research explored collegiate student-athletes who have transitioned from competitive athletic play into the world of work, which was a common experience that justifies the case study design for this research (Yin, 2018). As stated above, less than 2% of basketball and football student-athletes achieve a major professional, which underscored how often student-athletes transition from competitive athletic play into the world of work (NCAA, 2018). Also, the retention and graduation rates for Black male student-athletes and first-generation Black male students amplified unique considerations in terms of transitioning into the world of work. Therefore, the singular case of interest was Black, male, first-generation student-athletes from revenue-generating Division 1 sports who have transitioned from competitive athletic play into the world of work. At the second level, this research focused on two subunits in the transitional experience, which were student-athletes who have entered non-sport-related careers and student-athletes who have entered sport-related careers, such as coaching, athletic administrative roles, and athletic training. Through the subunits of analysis—transitions into sport-related careers and transitions into non-sport-related careers—this study had a specific focus for participants and information that will be sought, which promotes greater depth for the findings (Yin, 2018). Also, the subunits provided unique insight magnifying the primary case of student-athletes transitioning from competitive athletic play into the world of work (Yin, 2018). Given the subunits of

analysis, this research illuminated potential within-group and across-group similarities and differences regarding how the student-athletes navigated transitioning into sport-related and non-sport-related careers. Also, the embedded single-case design fostered individualized findings that prompted different appraisals of how researchers considered the student-athlete experience of transitioning from competitive athletic play into the world of work.

Although the case study research design did not offer generalizable outcomes, the findings provided historical context for the participants' experiences (Yin, 2018). The present study explored the finer details of the participants' experience, which has not received much consideration in previous research. Therefore, the study necessitated the explorative approach found in case study designs before the research generated a philosophical formula or process as found in a grounded theory design (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Through exploration, the participants' lived reality was captured, which affirmed the suitability of case study design because gathered the participants' lived reality rather than identified core meanings to their experiences as seen in phenomenological studies (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Furthermore, the case study approach was most appropriate because this approach sought individual and contextual insight for the population being studied instead of identifying cultural norms or behaviors as shown in ethnographic studies (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Lastly, the case study design was most applicable because it focused on the lived experience during a specific period rather than capturing an entire life history, which would be more indicative of narrative inquiry (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

In addition to the appropriateness of this design, one strength of the case study approach was that multiple forms of evidence explaining a certain phenomenon can be gathered for analysis, such as interviews, documents, artifacts, and direct observations (Yin, 2018). These pieces of evidence can foster follow-up questions to understand decision-making processes that generated a certain result (Schramm, 1971). Therefore, a case study approach allowed findings to communicate deeper insight regarding the student-athletes' transitional process. Instead of generalizing that athletic participation led to a certain career path, the research can show how the student-athletes arrived at certain decisions and give details regarding their transitional process. The case study approach offered a real-world account so that all contextual factors are considered in a student-athletes' transitional experience (Yin & Davis, 2007). Furthermore, the explorative nature of this study might promote future research that could devise a transition theory exclusive to student-athletes. Helping professionals could also explore interventions and programs that would help student-athletes navigate their transition to working roles.

Participants

Participants included in this study were former Division 1, first-generation, Black male college basketball and football student-athletes who have transitioned from competitive athletic play into the world of work. Athletic time commitments were the most demanding within Division 1 sports compared to lower NCAA Divisions with basketball and football student-athletes experiencing the most taxing time constraints (Paskus & Bell, 2016). Given the overrepresentation of Black male student-athletes in basketball and football, the Division 1 level seemed most critical to explore because these student-athletes were most susceptible to post-college challenges. In addition,

considering first-generation status of Black male student-athletes adds an additional layer to this concern given the limited data about first-generation college student-athlete experiences.

Through this research, the anticipation was that more insight would be provided about Black male student-athlete experiences, especially within two sports where they are most represented. Also, the post-college statistics offered a limited scope into outcomes for Black male basketball and football student-athletes. The limitation of reported outcomes and overrepresentation in Division 1 basketball and football made Black male first-generation student-athletes important to study with respect to transitioning into the world of work. An important notation regarding the participants is that they spent most of their college experiences at a Division 1 institution. However, there was one participant who began his college journey at a NAIA institution for a semester before transferring to a junior college and then finishing his final three years at a Division 1 institution. Furthermore, there was another participant who began his college journey at a junior college for two years before finishing his final two years of college at a Division 1 university. Also, there was another participant who participated in his sport as a walk-on student-athlete for one season before being offered a scholarship. Amidst the transitions, all seven participants were full scholarship recipients for most of their time attending their respective Division 1 institutions.

Furthermore, participants would be eligible if they did not actualize a professional athletic playing career after college. This exclusion criteria ensured that all participants made an immediate transition into the world of work. Though participants might have contemplated professional sports, their inability to actualize a career in professional

sports ensured that their identity as a competitive athlete ended in college. Additional exclusion criteria stipulated that participants should be employed for three months, be within three to ten years removed from college, and have no professional athletic playing career experience. Participants were required to have full-time employment, so there was some similarity between them despite their employment in a sport- or non-sport-related career. Current research suggests that adults aged 25 to 34 have job tenures of roughly three years (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020) and experience four job changes in the first ten years following graduation (Long, 2016). Therefore, participants who are removed from college for only three to ten years were likely to have settled into a long-term position or experienced one or more career changes. These criteria ensured that all participants would have reflections about workplace experiences and navigating the transition into a work setting. Also, Buote (2016) cites that 60% of employees feel comfortable in a new work setting after three months. Therefore, participants needed to have held their current position for at least three months so that reflections on their workplace experiences are not overshadowed by initial adjustment challenges. Despite these stipulations, an important notation regarding the participants within this study is that they were interviewed during the pandemic involving COVID-19. Therefore, their sense of connection to their workplaces were affected by the effects of the pandemic and work-from-home structures. In addition, there was a participant who was cycling between jobs due to layoffs and company restructuring during the pandemic. While all participants were employed in some capacity during the study, their work circumstances and transitions while undergoing the interview process were affected by the pandemic.

Procedures

Given the embedded single-case design, purposive sampling was implemented to identify participants that fit the desired demographic for this study. Through purposive sampling, participants were selected based on their qualities matching the interests of the research (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). Since this research focused on former Black, male, Division 1 student-athletes in revenue-generating sports, there was a smaller pool from which to select participants. Also, given the limited research regarding student-athletes transitioning from competitive athletic play into the world of work, intentional identification of participants was necessary to study this experience. According to Etikan, Musa, and Alkassim (2016), purposive sampling is not driven by a theory or specific number of participants. Instead, the focus is on identifying participants who will provide enlightening information situated within the demographic and experiential parameters of the study (Bernard, 2002; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Ishak & Abu Bakar, 2014; Patton, 2002). Given the specificity of the desired participants, snowball sampling was the form of purposive sampling that was implemented. The principal investigator had limited access to Division 1 student-athletes and received referrals to participants included in the study. Therefore, asking early participants to identify and attract additional participants to the study was strategic and valuable because they would know other Division 1 student-athletes who fit the desired demographic of this study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Neuman, 2009; Patton, 2015). This sampling approach assured that the differences between participants are narrow and primarily vary based on whether they entered a sport-related or non-sport-related career (Palinkas et al., 2016).

Upon identification, potential participants were contacted via phone or email to confirm their interest in participating in the study. Following this initial contact, potential

participants were emailed an electronic link to complete their informed consent, which included, but was not limited to the following information: voluntary participation, de-identified alias, benefits and risks of participation, and compensation. Participants had to electronically sign an informed consent signifying they read and agreed to the study's parameters before scheduling an interview. Participants were given contact information for the principal investigator and dissertation chair for follow-up purposes and further questions beyond the screening process. Once the informed consent process was complete, participants completed a brief screener (see Appendix B) to address the following inquiries: (1) general demographic information, (2) employment status, (3) first-generation status, (4) time since their last competition in Division 1 basketball or football, (5) date of undergraduate college graduation or last date of attendance in an undergraduate program, and (6) brief listings of all post-college career, volunteer, and personal endeavors. The screener was given to ensure that participants meet all necessary exclusion criteria to participate in the research study. The screener was completed through Qualtrics Survey Software so that participants' responses were recorded and saved through an online platform. After participants were deemed eligible for study participation, they were provided a list of available interview times and asked to identify three potential interview times in descending order of preference. Following this process, participants received a calendar invitation via email to which they were expected to confirm regarding their virtual attendance to the interview.

Given the study's retrospective approach, there was a protocol of questions established that focused on two periods: college reflections and post-college reflection (see Appendix C). Questions regarding college reflections explored post-college

expectations, post-college preparation, athletic experiences, and non-athletic experiences. Questions regarding post-college reflections explored workplace experiences, college experiences promoting career success, changes to their college experiences to promote career success, and future career plans. Yin (2018) suggests two interview types: short, which seek focused responses and last closer to 60 minutes, and prolonged, which seek explanatory responses and can last 120 minutes or more. Since two reflection periods were considered, the semi-structured interview combined both interview types so that all protocol questions were addressed and participant response deviations were unpacked (Johnson, 2001). Therefore, the semi-structured interviews lasted 75 to 110 minutes. This approach allowed participants to not feel rushed so that they could provide thorough responses to capture their experiences. Furthermore, the allotted time ensured that the reflections offered enough detail to capture a comprehensive picture of each participant's journey to their current career endeavors. This approach allowed the principal investigator to deepen his relationships with each participant and amplify the participants as informants to the study (Yin, 2018). Since the traditional, prolonged case study interviews were not achieved during this study, there was a reflexive threat given the investigator's background. However, the use of previous literature, theory triangulation, and member checking helped to minimize this threat (Yin, 2018).

Interviews were recording using a Sony ICD-PX470 Stereo Digital Voice Recorder with Built-in USB. Following all interviews, the recordings were transcribed for data analysis using Otter.ai, which is a voice notes, real-time transcription service. Transcripts were reviewed for errors and corrections were made by listening to the transcript and editing words within the Otter.ai transcription platform. Transcripts were

secured via password to limit access to the principal investigator. Participants' names were de-identified through aliases selected by the participant before the interview process. Transcribed interviews were stored on the Box cloud management system with a secured password so that access will be exclusive to the principal investigator, potential research assistant(s) conducting interviews, and dissertation committee members. Also, the Box cloud management system was stored on a protected server under the University of Missouri. During the study, the University of Missouri migrated all files on the Box cloud management system to the Microsoft OneDrive cloud storage management system. The same protections were in place upon the file migration. Interview transcripts were analyzed using Excel in which excerpts of the transcripts were extracted and given codes to identify the central meaning of the excerpt. In addition, the excerpts were assigned sub-codes to generate more specific insights regarding the data collected. The principal investigator employed an inductive coding approach in which codes were determined based on the collected data. In addition, the principal investigator conducted a thematic analysis in which a within-level analysis and a cross-level analysis were completed to compare the experiences between the two subunits of analysis: sport-related careers and non-sport-related careers.

Validation

Since the principal investigator aimed to capture the narrative accounts of the participants, there were no objective elements involved in the data collection process. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) assert that an assumption of qualitative research is that reality is flexible, subjective, and complex. Therefore, the collected data captured various perspectives regarding the transitional experiences of former Division 1 Black, male,

first-generation college basketball and football student-athletes into the world of work. The subsequent sections illustrated how member checking and triangulation were implemented to validate the findings and interpretations.

Member checking. During the data analysis process, the principal investigator employed member checking to gain feedback regarding the emergent themes from the interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Upon gathering the data, the principal investigator compiled the excerpts included in the results section and generated a comprehensive description of the emergent themes. This document was constructed to provide the participants with general insight of how the principal investigator understood and synthesized the findings for reporting purposes. Previous research illustrated that member checking processes can involve focus groups to allow study participants to convene and reflect whether the interpretation resonates with their experience and intended reflection (Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). However, the difficulty of coordinating a focus group was immense, which prompted the principal investigator to provide individual copies of the findings and request participant feedback. Participants were asked whether the general descriptions captured their sentiments and reflected the other participants' views based on the excerpts connected to each theme. This process ensured the principal investigator's beliefs were limited and do not distort the participants' experiences (Maxwell, 2013). Furthermore, the findings were compared to previous research to suggest new findings based on the present study or advance established narratives from existing literature. Through this process, the research showed how its revelations compared to broader contexts and are relevant for anyone who has endured work transitions (Tracy, 2010).

Triangulation. In addition to member checking, the principal investigator employed triangulation to validate the themes. The original plan involved establishing a research analysis team of former student-athletes to participate in the data collection and analysis process. The proposed team would have included both former Division 1 Black, male, first-generation college basketball and football student-athletes who did not participate in the study. However, the principal investigator had limited access to participants. Therefore, the intended research analysis team was dissolved so that the proposed team members could be included in the study. Consequently, the principal investigator was unable to implement researcher triangulation in which multiple researchers engage in individual analyses of the data and conclude the emergent themes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Tracy, 2010). Instead of using researcher triangulation, the principal investigator employed theory triangulation in which theoretical lenses were used to make sense of the collected data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015). The theoretical underpinnings of transition theory, social identity theory, and the theory of work adjustment were used to establish explanations for the participants' transitional experiences. Specifically, these theories shaped outcomes that a former student-athlete's transition into the world of work was predicated on their evaluation of their individual being, their salient identity, and their work environment's alignment with their values. Given the lack of pre-existing research about former Division 1 Black, male, first-generation college basketball and football student-athletes, these theories offered a basis for conclusions regarding their transitional experiences into the world of work.

Data Analysis

This research aimed to gather accounts of former Division 1 Black, male, first-generation college basketball and football student-athletes who transitioned out of sport into the world of work. Since there was limited research on Black male student-athlete experiences regarding career trajectories, the principal investigator engaged in an exploratory research process. These findings intended to provide firsthand insight regarding Black, male, first-generation college student-athletes, which could launch future research pursuits. Although the findings were not generalizable, this study offered considerations for practice that would assist Black, male, first-generation student-athletes with transitioning to the world of work. Given the lack of research on this population, the principal investigator employed an overarching inductive lens while analyzing the data. Specifically, thematic analysis was implemented to extract themes, conceptualize stories, and generate explanations regarding the experiences of former Division 1 Black, male, first-generation college basketball and football student-athletes transitioning out of sport into the world of work. Further details of these approaches are outlined in the proceeding sections.

Inductive analysis vs. deductive analysis. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) indicates that inductive analysis involves using data to develop hypotheses, theories, and beliefs regarding a certain experience. Furthermore, the findings were generated from a bottom-up approach in which participants inform the reflections and have their voices amplified to establish the outcomes (Creswell, 2013). However, deductive analysis includes a more conclusive and affirmative outcome. A deductive analysis operates with a more experimental design to test hypotheses and offer confirmatory results (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Also, deductive analysis compares the findings with established literature

to further existing conclusions and tests the validity of proposed hypotheses (Creswell, 2013).

This study was more fit for inductive analysis given the population of interest had limited data capturing their transitional experiences into the world of work. Although existing research has captured narratives surrounding career transitions for Division 1 student-athletes, the conclusions offer a general narrative for all college student-athletes. The existing literature does not account for the novel experiences of college student-athletes who also identify as Black, male, first-generation college students. Given this gap in the literature, deductive analysis offered fruitless outcomes because there were no existing theories to test or hypotheses to conclude. The issues surrounding former Division 1 Black, male, first-generation college student-athletes are still being revealed and comprehended. Conversely, inductive analysis provided a basis for understanding the lived experiences of former Division 1 Black, male, first-generation college basketball and football student-athletes transitioning from sport into the world of work. Through this study, new insights were gathered, which could yield future research pursuits that might affirm more conclusive results.

Thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006) described thematic analysis as an approach for detecting themes within the data. Since this research explored firsthand accounts, thematic analysis unearthed the specific actions and experiences that comprise how Black male student-athletes face their transition from competitive athletic play into the world of work. This approach sought to identify shared experiences of the participants that are substantial to the experience of Black male student-athletes transitioning into the world of work. Given the exploratory approach, this study implemented an inductive

thematic analysis in which the themes are generated from the participants' reflections (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Furthermore, this approach allowed patterns of behavior and series of events to establish significant explanations of a common experience. In addition, the thematic analysis in this study applied a more semantic approach in which patterns were identified then interpreted to propose inferences about the participants' lived reality (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

In addition to Braun and Clarke, there were additional thematic analytical lenses considered to unpack the transitional accounts of former Division 1 Black, male, first-generation college basketball and football student-athletes into the world of work. Thematic analysis was employed to identify cases in which a theoretical argument could develop rather than a statistical conclusion (Riessman, 2008). Given that transitional experiences were considered regarding pursuing sport-related and non-sport-related careers, thematic analysis generated a basis for understanding the different interpretations of the same experience (Riessman, 2008). Although each participant provided accounts in which they might have achieved a similar outcome, there were nuances and subtleties within each interview that needed careful attention. Riessman's (2008) lens positioned thematic analysis to gather relevant details and construct a story about the participants' experiences. Although the participants offered lengthy descriptions of their journeys through college and after college, the interview itself would not provide a seamless picture. Instead, the analysis process involved the principal investigator scrutinizing each individual transcript to generate a comprehensive story (Riessman, 2008). Also, this analytical lens championed the incorporation of established theories to interpret the different cases (Riessman, 2008). In this study, there were theoretical underpinnings that

shaped the research questions and relevant theories that emerged from collected data. Therefore, thematic analysis facilitated a narrative conceptualization of the transitional experiences of former Division I Black, male, first-generation college basketball and football student-athletes into the world of work.

While identifying themes and constructing stories were important products for thematic analysis, making sense of the data was a critical aspect of thematic analysis. Although there were multiple strategies to apply, it is important to note that this study was not suitable for logical model analysis or time-series analysis. Given that career development does not always have a linear trajectory, this study was not interested in identifying a sequence of events capturing how one reaches a particular career outcome, which would typify logical model analysis (Yin, 2018). Furthermore, the exploration of the transitional experiences for the studied population monitored their broad journey into the world of work rather than explicit changes in work experiences and positions through the transitional process, which would characterize time-series analysis (Yin, 2018).

In this study, thematic analysis facilitated explanation building establish reasons for why certain outcomes were reached (Yin, 2018). Also, these explanations generated theories that described the behaviors and outcomes shared by the participants. Given that an inductive approach shaped the analysis, Yin's (2018) analytic strategy of "working from the ground up" was a central tenet of the analysis process. As stated, the population of interest had lacking research history. Therefore, the results from this study provided new insight for future research pursuits. In particular, the results were analyzed to examine "how" an outcome was reached and craft a theoretical proposition to craft a worthy explanation for the results (Yin, 2018). In this study, theoretical underpinnings

helped propose the theory that former Division 1 Black, male, first-generation college basketball and football student-athletes would pursue work environments in which their identities as athletes would flourish. The significance of athletic identity for the studied population was deemed a principal factor in theorizing their post-college work pursuits because sports represented an area of interest and expertise. Despite this proposition, the data offered opportunities to revisit the initial theory and adjust the proposition to reflect the achieved results (Yin, 2018).

In addition to explanation building, pattern matching was an additional strategy considered for the data analysis. Although the impetus of this study was to extract the experiences of the studied population, there were preconceived notions regarding how former Division 1 Black, male, first-generation college basketball and football student-athletes in this study would endure the transition into the world of work. Pattern matching offered the opportunity to compare the results of the study to the presumption that the participants would pursue work opportunities in which their identities as athletes would flourish (Yin, 2018). In this case, the results would demonstrate literal replication whereby the same outcome would appear repeatedly across different cases (Yin, 2018). Therefore, the participants would all share a consensus regarding their approach to the transition out of sport into the world of work.

In addition to pattern matching, the theoretical underpinnings considered plausible rivals, or alternative explanations for the results (Yin, 2018). Given the proposed theory, there was a lens for projecting the experiences of the participants. However, the results presented additional insight for which the theoretical proposition could not account. Yin (2018) referred to this outcome as theoretical replication in which the same outcome

would not repeat across different cases due to different circumstances. As a result, rival theories were considered as they represented a different explanation that better captured the results (Yin, 2018). Ultimately, the data analysis process followed an inductive, thematic approach to develop themes that best surmise how former Division 1 Black, male, first-generation college basketball and football student-athletes navigated their transition into the world of work.

Step-by-step process. To establish the emergent themes, the following steps were pursued: (1) Review participant transcripts to establish initial codes, (2) organize different excerpts into categorical matrices, and (3) synthesize the excerpts into specific emergent themes. Upon creating the themes, participants were sent a document with the five themes listed and described in brief detail with all relevant excerpts used to unpack each theme in the results section. The excerpts were compiled to reflect new insight, show symmetry with existing literature, and advance previous insight about transitioning from sport into the world of work for the former Division 1 Black, male, first-generation college basketball and football student-athletes in this study. Also, the findings were compared to the theoretical lenses of transition theory, social identity theory, and theory of work adjustment. Furthermore, additional theoretical frameworks, including nigrescence theory and Maslow's hierarchy of needs, were comparison points given the discoveries from the participants' reflections.

Given that the research employed an inductive analytical approach, inductive coding was an analysis process used for this study. Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) describe inductive coding as the development of codes based on insight from the raw data and during the data collection process. Instead of entering the research with preconceived

codes, which is deductive coding, the codes were derived from the data so that the participants' voices were amplified. The coding process commenced with First Cycle coding to establish the codes that best described the data (Saldaña, 2009). Specifically, initial coding was the type of coding employed, which is a process of classifying the data based on distinct sections to identify similarities and differences (Braun & Clark, 2006; Saldaña, 2009; Creswell, 2013). To advance the coding process, descriptive coding, which uses categorizing phrases or words to describe data points, was implemented to depict how pertinent excerpts connected to the research questions (Saldaña, 2009). As additional interviews and data were conducted and synthesized, codes were revisited to ensure their relevance to the research questions. Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) described that initial codes might be eliminated because they did not show much significance across the participants. For example, an initial code that appeared during First Cycle coding was "Non-Athletic Opportunities." However, the relevant data excerpts did not develop substantial insight as its own code. Therefore, "Non-Athletic Opportunities" was eliminated to be consumed within the "Belongingness (General)" initial code.

In addition to eliminating codes, revising codes was important to synthesizing the data. Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) described that initial codes might be revised because they were too "bulky" and captured too many data excerpts. In that case, Second Cycle coding was needed to better understand what the data points were eliciting (Saldaña, 2009). When bulky codes emerge, subcoding, which involves applying secondary tags to capture richer details, helps with understanding the intricacies of the experiences shared by the participants (Miles et al., 2014). As a result, axial coding was

employed to better understand the nuances between different data excerpts that encapsulated an initial code (Saldaña, 2009). For example, bulky initial codes that emerged from the data were “Future Planning” and “Transition to Work.” While they offered significant contributions to the research questions, the data points were immense. Through assigning axial codes, better fragmentation of the initial codes was discovered whereby “Future Planning,” emerged axial codes, such as “Lack of Direction” and “Vision for Career,” and “Transition to Work” emerged axial codes, such as “Readiness for Work” and “Realization of Sport Ending.” Upon creating the axial codes, greater synthesis of the data emerged which created the themes in which multiple codes described a shared reality for a specific subunit of analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

For this study, the subunits of analysis were former Division 1 Black, male, first-generation college basketball and football student-athletes who either pursued sport-related careers or non-sport-related careers. As a result, the themes suggested probable, but not conclusive, outcomes for the population with respect to how they navigated the transition from sport into the world of work. In addition, the development of themes fueled within-level and cross-level analyses. Specifically, the within-level analysis included themes that indicated individual sets of shared experiences and behaviors representing student-athletes who have entered sport-related careers or student-athletes who have entered non-sport-related careers. Once the themes were solidified between each subunit, the cross-level analysis illustrated differences between each subunit of analysis. Ultimately, the theme development process offered conclusions about how Black male student-athletes have approached career decisions based on whether they have pursued sport-related careers or non-sport-related careers.

Data saturation. Since the research was conducted through a qualitative lens, data saturation was a critical component of determining the richness of the findings. According to Fusch and Ness (2015), interviews represent an approach to achieve data saturation, especially when pursuing participants that are not commonly researched (Bernard, 2012). Given the scope of the research, former Division 1 Black, male, first-generation college basketball and football student-athletes were an underrepresented population within research regarding career transition for college athletes. Therefore, this population served as a viable option to study. Due to the nature of the data collection process, there was no specific number of participants to interview for the purpose of ensuring robust results, but the goal was to interview as many relevant participants as possible (Bernard, 2012). However, Fusch and Ness (2015) highlights that there was no definite conclusion that having a substantial number or a small number of participants guaranteed significant findings.

With this in mind, selecting a reliable, yet simple, method for determining data saturation was important. The method employed for this study based data saturation upon whether new data points offered little to no new useful information based on the research aims (Guest, Namey, & Chen, 2020). Guest, Namey, and Chen (2020) indicated that saturation is evaluated by comparing the newest data points to the established base for the collected data. As new data points were evaluated, there was a calculation of how much new data has been gathered. Data saturation was gaged by the base size, which is the collection of original data points from the first set of interviews, and the new data points compiled within a subsequent run length, which is the number of new interviews containing additional data points (Guest, Namey, & Chen, 2020). The saturation ratio,

which is the ratio of new data points to original data points, determines data saturation. Through this method, data saturation was achieved once the saturation ratio is 5% or lower. In addition, the method advised that data saturation could be analyzed during or after data collection.

As data were collected, the principal investigator compiled data points within matrices to sort the different excerpts and connect them to relevant codes. Based on the First Cycle coding process, there were 16 initial codes compiled (see Appendix E). Once the Second Cycle coding process was completed, the 16 initial codes were fragmented into 84 axial codes (see Appendix F). Given Guest, Namey, and Chen's (2020) proposed saturation method, the axial codes fragmented from the initial codes were used to determine data saturation since each axial code represented the introduction of new information. To calculate data saturation, there was a base of 3 interviews chosen for this study since these interviews occurred around the same time during the data collection process (see Appendix H). Previous research suggests that qualitative data present the most unique accounts are revealed during the beginning stages of data collection (Guest, Namey, & Chen, 2020). Since data saturation is based on the introduction of new information, the axial codes were accounted for once by assigning each axial code to the participant who initially introduced the information. For example, all the participants offered accounts resonating with the axial code, "Sport Is First," within the "Belongingness (Campus)" initial code. However, the axial code, "Sport Is First," was only assigned to Benaiah because he was the first participant to introduce this information during the data collection process (see Appendix G). From there, the number of base codes was determined by the number of new initial codes assigned to the first

three interview participants. Then, following every two interviews after the first three, the saturation ratio was assessed to determine whether data saturation had been reached.

After conducting seven interviews, the saturation ratio, or new initial codes from the sixth and seventh interviews compared to the base codes was 4.9% (see Appendix H).

Therefore, the principal investigator concluded that data saturation was achieved, and no further participants were needed for data collection purposes.

Reflexivity

This research sought to explore the experiences of former Division 1 Black, male, first-generation college basketball and football student-athletes. To offer personal context, the principal investigator, identifies as a Black man and a first-generation college student. A significant nuance is that the principal investigator had older cousins who earned 4-year college degrees, which provided some context for navigating college. In addition, the principal investigator earned a 4-year degree from a Division 3 institution and did not compete in varsity athletics. Though Division 1 athletics were excluded from his college experience, the principal investigator had exposure to the developmental process for collegiate student-athletes. During early and middle adolescence, the principal investigator competed in AAU basketball and competed in varsity high school basketball. The principal investigator also participated in organized practices for 4 – 5 days each week, local weekend tournaments, national tournaments, seasonal basketball leagues, conference games, divisional playoffs, and summer basketball camps. Furthermore, the principal investigator competed with and against numerous basketball student-athletes who achieved collegiate and professional playing careers. These efforts were asserted in

hopes that the principal investigator would receive the opportunity to compete as a Division 1 basketball student-athlete.

Despite these aspirations, the principal investigator did not center athletics while embracing his identity as a student-athlete. Conversely, the principal investigator's year-round participation in basketball included a healthy dose of non-athletic activities. These activities included school leadership positions, leadership and academic conferences, and corporate work and medical internships. Furthermore, the principal investigator's parents emphasized educational engagement and the development of additional passions. Most of all, basketball was deemed a privilege in which the principal investigator could participate only by giving maximal effort in his academic endeavors. Therefore, the principal investigator's engagement in school and basketball was similar, which bred enjoyment in both activities. While the principal investigator exhausted his energy in school and basketball, he was unable to devote adequate time into basketball to maintain pace with his counterparts. Consequently, the principal investigator recognized that balancing his student-athlete identity would not position him to excel at both endeavors. Given this realization, the principal investigator decided to forfeit his athletic identity as he entered late adolescence due to professional goals, achievement expectations, and personal well-being.

Upon making this decision, the principal investigator navigated a transitional journey in which high-intensity basketball competition was no longer a salient identity. Subsequently, the principal investigator's attention shifted from being a student-athlete to merely being a student as he matriculated through undergraduate studies. Reminiscing on the principal investigator's transitional process, there were challenges and uncertainties

about relinquishing or redefining his athletic identity. His physical schedule and activity changed whereby daily practices and training, weekend tournaments, and summer camps were no longer part of his expected endeavors. Furthermore, the principal investigator experienced emotional emptiness because he wanted basketball to remain in his life, but he felt compelled to prioritize his academic work and future career trajectory.

Consequently, the principal investigator had more time to seek resources dedicated to career planning during his undergraduate studies and make informed decisions through real-world experience and training. Given this context, the principal investigator endured the physical journey of pursuing a professional athletic playing career. Also, the principal investigator experienced the emotional, mental, and logistical challenges of relinquishing a dream of a professional athletic playing career. Therefore, the principal investigator was curious about the transitional process of student-athletes sharing similar identities who left sport after garnering collegiate playing careers and coming close to actualizing professional playing careers.

Though the principal investigator holds these curiosities, he recognizes that his development has some influences on the questions and participants' responses (Yin, 2018). To start, the principal investigator's experience was shaped by a well-rounded collection of activities. While the principal investigator experienced an intense schedule, his academic work, athletic engagement, and additional extra-curricular activities concluded during his high school experience. The principal investigator lacks a firsthand experiential reality of collegiate student-athletes' lived experiences, but the principal investigator holds beliefs regarding their intense schedules and over-emphasis of athletic involvement. Similarly, the principal investigator acknowledges the subsequent

predispositions surrounding well-rounded development and experiences for student-athletes. In addition, the principal investigator has experience providing clinical support to Division 1 student-athletes, which offers direct insight into their challenges. The principal investigator's current work has not addressed clinical concerns regarding career transitions for collegiate student-athletes. However, his transitional experience has engendered presumptions regarding the difficulty of Division 1 basketball and football student-athletes transitioning out of sport. Given the principal investigator's background, he entered this research with the belief that Division 1 basketball and football student-athletes devote excessive amounts of time to their sport and need more time to develop additional interests. Also, the principal investigator participated in this research with beliefs that Division 1 basketball and football student-athletes have limited opportunities to develop belongingness outside of athletic spaces. Ultimately, the principal investigator's personal and professional exposure has shaped his analytical lens, which influenced his conceptualization of the findings and themes.

Although the principal investigator's background informed his understanding and empathy towards the participants' reflections. Despite not achieving a Division 1 athletic playing career, the principal investigator endured training and skill development in the hopes of pursuing collegiate athletics. Given that he was unable to materialize this aspiration, the principal investigator engaged in his own transitional process out of competitive athletic play, which involved a similar experience of identity reconciliation. Therefore, this experience informed questions established within the interview protocol along with follow-up questions posed during the interview process. The principal investigator's background helped to generate connection with the participants through

compassion and identification with the challenge of transitioning to a lived experience in which sport assumes a reduced role within a person's life.

Given the investigator's background, this study approached the analysis of former Division 1 Black, male, first-generation college basketball and football student-athletes transitioning out of sport into the world of work from a relativist ontological lens and a constructivist epistemological lens. The constructivist epistemological lens suggested that knowledge about how former Division 1 Black, male, first-generation college basketball and football student-athletes navigated their transition into the world of work was created through experience and subjective conclusions (Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Therefore, this epistemological approach informed the relativist ontological lens, which suggested that the conditions of the participants' realities were individualized to their experiences despite potential similarities (Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Considering the principal investigator's journey through competitive athletics, he established beliefs that his exposure to alternative identities and familial encouragement shaped his pursuit of higher education and post-college plans. However, a slight change in his background might have fueled a different journey. While the participants have shared experiences as former Division 1 Black, male, first-generation college basketball and football student-athletes, their individual contexts can predispose them to various outcomes.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

This chapter captured the results of this case study in which the former student-athletes provided reflections about their college experiences and transitions from college into the world of work. There are multiple subsections illustrating several aspects of the results including the following: final participant demographics, thematic analysis, and data-driven answers to the research questions. Since this study captured data via interviews, this analysis will illustrate the symmetry across participant reflections in how they navigate their matriculation through college into the world of work.

Demographics

The original study design was intended to collect interview data from participants who met the following criteria: (1) Identified as Black man, (2) identified as a first-generation college student, (3) participated in Division 1 basketball or football, (4) had been removed from undergraduate studies and college athletics for at least three years, but no more than 10 years, and (5) had not achieved a professional athletic playing career or opportunity. The impetus for this exclusion criteria was to convey the accounts of former student-athletes who experienced an immediate transition from sport into the world of work. However, the limited scope of the participant pool created challenges with identifying eligible participants. The principal investigator wanted to maintain the fidelity of the racial and college identity demographics due to the novelty of this population. Therefore, the exclusion criteria regarding participation in a professional athletic playing career and the time elapsed since college athletics ended were loosened to gather more data to reach saturation (see Appendix D). Specifically, John was drafted to a

professional football team but did not participate beyond the first preseason. Nas played in an overseas professional basketball league for 11 months following the end of college. Despite their brief stints in professional athletics, both participants were contemplating and navigating career transitions away from sport during this period.

Thematic Analysis

As indicated, the participants recounted their journey through their undergraduate studies and athletic participation into their transition into the world of work. Participants detailed their collegiate experiences with respect to issues of belongingness, time devoted to sport, and preparation for the future. Participants also detailed their experiences after leaving college regarding how they began their professional careers, current professional endeavors, and aspirations for their career futures. Through the analysis process, the data presenting 16 initial codes with over 350 data excerpts capturing the participants' accounts of transitioning from collegiate sports into the world of work. Upon gathering these excerpts, there were five emergent themes extracted from the data: Athletic Identity Reinforcement, Lack of Self-Directed Choices, Connection through Identifiable Spaces, Village-Based Support, and Career Decision-Making Difficulties. Also, each emergent theme yielded subthemes (see Appendix I). In the proceeding sections, there are details capturing the raw elements of the participants' reflections.

Theme 1: Athletic Identity Reinforcement

The research participants had various journeys through their undergraduate and post-graduate experiences. While all participants competed at the Division 1 level, every participant did not begin college as a Division 1 student-athlete. Despite their unique journeys through college, they all appeared to share a similar experience of being valued

in conjunction with their identity as a student-athlete. Their sense of self and value seemed contingent on their association with their sport. Specifically, the participants shared their self-concept was reinforced in several domains: belongingness, daily scheduling, post-graduate visioning, and accessing and using developmental resources.

Belongingness. The research participants shared that each of their Division 1 institutions had populations over 10,000 students (see Appendix D). Despite the vast number of students within their environments, their sense of identity was tied to the athletic environment. Whether they were competing on the field, participating in athletic training exercises, or walking across campus, the primary sense of belonging was derived from athletic participation. Even though they attended classes and participated in the campus social life, the participants shared that their sense of connection was strengthened by their athletic identity. John expressed that “[he] wasn’t connected with campus unless it involved sport (354–355).” B provided a more elaborate response in which he stated:

As a black football player, I mean, we of course, we felt welcomed in the fieldhouse and on the field during the game. Well, when going into classrooms maybe like a mathematics class, you know, I mean, it’s just like you’re on your own there. (132–134)

Jamer also shared similar sentiments about connection being tied to his sport:

I felt most welcome when I was doing anything related to football. That’s pretty much it, you know what I mean. I felt most welcome at like games, anything related to football. Outside of that, I didn’t necessarily feel welcomed at all (278–280).

Though their athletic participation garnered fanfare and attention, they did not feel connected to their campuses once they removed their jerseys. These reflections indicated that their athletic identities were reinforced through the lack of connection to the rest of

the campus. The jerseys and athletic environment created a sense of acceptance that very few other environments established.

In addition, there were instances in which participants shared how their coaches responded to them in different circumstances that reinforced athletics as their primary identity.

For example, Benaiah shared his experience of joining a social fraternity in which he shared: "...that was very challenging in and of itself, because I actually pledged during the season, my sophomore year. So, when my coach found out, he was really pissed off at me, you know, a selfish move, you know, on my behalf (374–376)." This evidence suggested that non-athletic activities were inappropriate. Though fraternities were part of the university experience, there was no room or appreciation for participating in activities that were unrelated to sport. Furthermore, Eric presented additional evidence of athletics being the primary focus:

You know how they say "student-athlete." Like they kind of switch it to make it seem like you're here for sports and then school was secondary. But you know what I'm saying, that was something that I learned, like these people really don't care about you the way you think they do. Because it's like, even our coaches used to tell us like, "You all's play affects me putting food in my children's mouth (69–73)."

Regardless of whether the actions are sport-related or deviations from sport, the student-athletes' sense of belongingness was significantly driven by their connection to the athletic space. The opportunities to identify as something other than an athlete were almost nonexistent. Non-athletic identities were stifled and discouraged, which suggested that belongingness was tied to athletic participation. They were there to be an athlete; everything else was secondary or unimportant.

Even through unfortunate events, athletic identity was reinforced as the prime and prestigious identity. Eric disclosed that he navigated injuries throughout his collegiate experience. In his account, he presented a telling experience of belongingness related to his injury history:

It's like they can say they care about you, but so it's a relationship where it's like, "What have you done for me lately?" And most of that is reflected upon your play. So, I also had a very unique situation because I also had four surgeries...I was like, "Man, the most important for me is to play." Because when I'm not playing and when I'm hurt, they don't talk to me. It's cutthroat like that, you know. So, you get walked by (31–38).

Though his injuries occurred within sport, the sense of belongingness seemed contingent upon his availability to perform. Consequently, mattering seemed to be tied to being dressed in his athletic uniform. These responses reinforced the notion that athletic participation was the primary reason for the student-athlete's presence on the campus. Therefore, belonging and mattering was conditional according to the student-athletes' availability to participate in their sport. Any reduction or limitation to athletic participation would have adverse effects on belongingness.

Daily scheduling. While belongingness and connection to the campus play a role in reinforcing athletic identity, the participants' discussion of their daily schedule also suggested that they only mattered in their athletic uniform. All the participants recalled their typical day, which usually began around 5:00 AM and lasted until late hours of the night around 11:00 PM. The activities within this time window included several athletic activities, including trainings, practices, and film sessions, class attendance, and auxiliary activities, such as study groups and leisure. While the participants shared that they engaged in outside activities, such as community service, spiritual practices, and socializing within the campus, these opportunities were seldom or placed a significant

strain on scheduling and meeting commitments. Even with the inclusion of non-athletic activities, the scheduling always revolved around whether the activity could fit with respect to their sport.

The scheduling process started with how the classes were selected. Tony discussed his experience of scheduling in which he shared, “They’re gonna make your schedule, you know, match with the football schedule (142).” Many of the participants indicated a block of time in which classes were scheduled so that they could be available for their athletic endeavors. Even though they might have been interested in certain courses or a specific major, they were not able to make those choices. Tony shared that he had a football advisor who “[matched his] classes with the schedule in football (143).” In essence, he was told what he was doing with respect to his coursework. Though he was a student-athlete at his university, the academic side of his experience was constructed for him. The participants’ academic experience was validated and shaped by whether they could be available in an athletic sense, which further reinforced the idea that their athletic identity was most important.

Furthermore, the participants expanded this notion of scheduling being shaped by their athletic identity by suggesting how much influence it had on their livelihood. In some instances, participants indicated that their sport participation went beyond structuring class options. According to Nas, scheduling was considered “hard at times because of the rigors of Division 1 basketball, you really don’t have your own schedule. It’s really kind of structured for yourself throughout the team dynamic (96–97).” Eric echoed this perspective with more demonstrative language, citing the following:

...but it's like once you play and follow college football like it kind of got you. Like, it controls your entire life, literally your entire life. So, every move you make is contingent upon them (914–916).

These perspectives were significant because it communicated how much sport was central to their identity. Their athletic identity dictated whether an activity could be considered or not, even if it involved class, which is part of their experience.

Post-graduate visioning. Given the consistent reinforcement of athletic identity, the participants also shared how Division I athletic participation affected post-graduate considerations. There might have been other aspects of their identity that they could have developed, but they were not able to engage in those parts of themselves. Jamer questioned whether the college experience was designed to cultivate any other aspects of student-athletes. Through his lens, Jamer posed this inquiry and perspective:

Is that school truly investing into [the student-athletes'] education? Their career choices? Their major? No! They're using your natural talents and capabilities for profit to get more kids into your all white school (353–355).

For him, the student-athlete experience emphasized his athletic identity to the point where he did not feel his other identities or experiences of college were nurtured.

Football served as a major component of his experience, and he did not feel he had a chance to develop additional interests. Furthermore, Jamer highlighted the consequence of his focused attention on football once his playing experience shifted:

You're doing all these things for football and you're not getting the opportunity to play, right? Like, in your mind, you're going to the NFL, you know, and then all of a sudden like your dreams get shattered right before your eyes (557–559)...you know, I fell into a state of depression because now it's like who am I if I don't play football (570–571)?

Jamer had clear aspirations for competing at the professional ranks, but his limited playing time deterred any hope of achieving a professional playing career. However, his

experience reinforced his athletic identity in a way that did not allow him to consider alternate roads. Even Eric shared a similar sentiment about the future plans, stating, “I put all my eggs in one basket. Like I literally, like, I painted a picture for myself that was just so unreal.” With a structure that reinforces and prioritizes athletic identity, student-athletes have a narrow view for their futures. There are “wake-up calls” in the form of limited playing time or injuries that generate the reality that professional sports are unlikely, but these lightbulb moments may not emerge until the latter stages of college. Consequently, student-athletes are often limiting their post-graduate pursuits without much room to pivot when plans collapse.

Accessing and using developmental resources. The reinforcement of athletic identity through the structure of Division 1 football and basketball seems to also create transactional experiences with coaches and limit the use of resources for future development. When discussing engagement in non-athletic activities, Jamer declared that “you never feel like you’re necessarily working on anything except football.” The structure is established through set schedules so there is not much time to consider other resources for support, such as instructors, career support professionals, or other campus members. In addition, the sense of belongingness compounds the experience of accessing resources that might influence matriculation experiences or future development. When asked about potential changes to his college experience if he could relive his journey, Nas stated that “[he] would change [schools], because [he didn’t] have [a] connection to [his] school. [He didn’t] know any professors still there [and he didn’t] really know [his] professors (899–901).” In addition, Eric recalled his experience once football ended and how he felt about support from his coaches and team personnel:

So, it's like, once I stopped by playing ball for them like, there was no need for them to be checking up on my grades...because like, you're not pouring into the 12 men that I have in my room (483–486).

Through athletic identity being reinforced, the participants did not envision themselves outside of the athletic realm. Also, their experiences did not facilitate relationships that they could maintain outside of their respective sports. Their schedules limited how and whether they could participate in non-athletic activities. Lastly, the player-coach relationship appeared to be the most consistent, especially given the frequent discussion of sport activities. However, this relationship showed transactional elements at times given the notion of academic well-being wavering once the student-athlete's eligibility ends.

Theme 2: Lack of Self-Directed Choices

Though athletic identity reinforced the participants' self-concept and value during college, their sense of autonomy created additional frustrations. Athletics was not only their identifying factor. It also was the deciding factor for how they lived and considered the future. Recent statistics confirmed that over 60% of Division 1 male football and basketball student-athletes believe they will play professional sports (Paskus & Bell, 2016), but less than 2% will achieve this feat (NCAA, 2019a). Despite this reality, the participants emphasized that their college matriculation did not set the stage to make specific choices with this in mind. Competing at the collegiate level was a desire for each participant, but they seemed to feel stifled about how they could incorporate athletic participation within their total college experience. Instead, their reflections communicated that all endeavors had to fit around their sport activities, which limited or

eliminated choice. In particular, the participants shared their sense of choice created a few limitations: major selection and scheduling necessary and auxiliary activities.

Major selection. Like the general population of college students, collegiate student-athletes decide on a major. This decision can be quite monumental as it sets the stage for potential career possibilities and other postgraduate plans. In many cases, college students exercise their autonomy and select a major that suits their long-term goals and aspirations. However, the participants recalled their experiences and shared different experiences in terms of major selection. In particular, transferring from a junior college to a four-year institution created challenges with maintaining an established academic plan. Nas recalled his experience of transferring and how he arrived at his major choice:

I really didn't have a choice. They kind of picked it for me. It was Criminology and a minor in Sociology. When they were telling me what my schedule or what grades would transfer over from junior college to Division 1, it was kind of like, "Well, do Criminology." It wasn't something that I knew about. I didn't know what Criminology was before I got there or anything like that, or what it consists of (107-113).

In a similar sense, Tony recalled how the transition to his university presented additional obstacles for completing his degree:

And then when I went to [my Division 1 school, my major] changed to Criminal Justice because all my classes that transferred over, I would have to do more years if I would have stayed in Mass Communication (113-114).

Despite starting a plan of study, these two participants faced challenges as it relates to continuing their original major or choosing a path that fit their vision or interests. In different ways, Nas and Tony were not involved in deciding their academic pursuits. They were limited to choices that would permit their matriculation at their institution.

Although the transfer process created its own challenges, a primary challenge in selecting a major was the impact it would have on athletic pursuits. Even though there might be other interests or possibilities to consider with respect to academic work, the participants emphasized how selecting a major needed to assure little to no interference with sport. Jamer identified a game plan in which he acknowledged, “Okay, [I’m] going to be doing film, practice, games, like, [I] need to go with a major that’s less stressful (149–150).” Furthermore, Jamer followed up this reflection with clarity regarding this decision:

So, when it came down to choosing a major man, it really came down to “what is going to be the easiest for me, so I can balance football and school, so I can have a GPA where I can keep playing (159–161)?”

Prior to making the decision, Jamer’s autonomy was disarmed by the thought of the athletic endeavors he would need to consider. His thought process did not prioritize his interests or previous aspirations. Instead, his choice for an academic major rested on whether he met the various demands of his sport. Similarly, Eric contemplated his major selection through the lens of whether this choice would affect his sport participation. Moreover, he considered how it would position him to move towards his professional athletic aspirations:

It was really a situation where they put me in something that I could really just play ball and graduate. So, I picked Sociology and had a minor in Africana Studies. So, I really just wanted to stay away from Math, stay away from Chemistry than just pick a major for me. So, it wasn’t how you would think to be career driven. It was more so for me—I just need something that’s going to get me out of here so I could go to the league (142–146).

Consequently, the participants conveyed that they made decisions about their major based on external driving forces. They were not centered in the decision-making process with

respect to their preferences. Instead, they had to work around the structure of their sport to identify an academic plan.

Scheduling necessary and auxiliary activities. In addition to selecting a major, choice was limited with respect to how the participants structured their days. As previously indicated, majors were selected with respect to rigor and matriculation processes. Also, the participants named that choosing a major and class schedule would be contingent upon whether the classes could be taken around the athletic itinerary. John reflected that it was imperative to “try to stay away from anything that’s going to interfere with practice times or meeting times (202-204).” Given these parameters, the participants shared that they had a window of time to fit classes into their schedule. All the participants discussed early starts to their day around 5:00 AM or 6:00 AM with morning workouts, practices, or rehabilitation. Following this start, there was a window of time in which classes were attended. In essence, the classes within that window of time were classes available to them. After classes, there were evening activities, which could include film sessions, practices, and rehabilitation. With this typical schedule, Jamer reflected on how he and his teammates could not pursue certain majors because class offerings coincided with sport. Specifically, he recalled “watching players not [be] able to select the major that they wanted because coaches have a problem with the labs being during practice, or film, or whatever the case may be (141–143).” Furthermore, Jamer described a change he would have made if given the opportunity to relive college:

I would have majored in like Business Administration or something like that if I could. Most of us did not major in Business, though, because of the labs. They had labs at times—we had practice like at like 6:00 PM. So, we couldn’t do that, not at [my Division 1 university] (1132–1134).

He chose to abandon his personal plan to adopt a plan that fit with his football schedule. His reflection of choosing a different major communicates that his lived experience did not empower him in making decisions. This notion suggested that the participants operated as if their institution had reduced academic offerings because certain courses and majors were inaccessible.

Despite this challenge, there were proposed alternatives that could facilitate different opportunities and outcomes. In particular, Jamer vented about institution's accommodations for the student-athlete experience:

And it's not like college don't try? They do. They just don't try hard enough. I just feel like even if athletes have to be taught a different way. Even if you have to separate them from the regular student...You know if they want to choose Business as a major. Like, you know, Business for athletes this time, you know. Like different classes, right (945–949)?

Though Jamer did not suggest that student-athletes are neglected, Jamer emphasized that the current structure for student-athletes is not sufficient for them to direct their own path. In his eyes, there might be considerations for classes scheduled during period that would increase options and choices for class scheduling and selecting majors. In a similar light, Nas echoed the sentiment of student-athlete autonomy in designing their academic path:

I think you should be able to take general classes in your first year and see which ones that you like, and then, kind of shape it and let them pick. And forget about the schedule—I mean not forget about the schedule. But make sure that if we are saying “student first,” make sure that we are really saying student first and then athlete second, because I feel like I was an athlete-student. That's how I felt. So really just letting them—don't pick their major. Let them pick their major and you work around that, or whatever, if it's really about student-athlete or amateurism, in a sense (937–945).

With this perspective, Nas illustrated the value placed on his identity and how that shaped his college experience, especially related to academics. For him, his experience seemed to minimize his academic identity, which insinuated he did not feel involved in that part

of his college experience. Furthermore, the lack of choice created the sense that academics were a peripheral aspect of navigating college.

In addition to the challenge of selecting courses and majors, the participants discussed how their experiences within their major still suffered from scheduling conflicts. Specifically, B discussed the limitation of using other resources to navigate his academic experience:

Going through my major, just knowing that—I say it kind of was a little struggle for me. Basically, not being able to really have the time to work with, you know, other students to grasp certain concepts in the class. And maybe, you know, the teachers, they do have like office hours and different things like that, but, you know, we got practice. So, it's hard for me to even go to those office hours because I got practice and it's not like, you know, with study hall you have to be in study hall. You can't say, "Oh, I'm going to this teacher's office." Because [study hall] is a place that you actually have to clock in and out. So, it was a little bit of a struggle, not being able to get the extra help that you would grasp if you were just a regular student (143–150).

While selecting classes was a challenge, B encountered further challenges in pursuing auxiliary, yet necessary, activities to ensure a successful academic experience. He did not feel he had the opportunity to engage in valuable activities such as office hours or supplementary learning spaces that could be useful to his academic performance. B also expanded his reflection regarding time for activities aside from attending class and athletic endeavors citing, "You don't even have, really, time. I mean, you may be able to get into a study group or something like that, but it's really no other activity that you can [do] (221–223). Even with selecting a major that fits the athletic demands, B identified that he could not participate in activities that are related to the class, which includes attendance and group assignments. B's reflection posited he could not participate in pertinent academic activities, let alone any other non-athletic pursuits if they were not mandatory activities for him.

In addition to the institutional challenges of scheduling classes and choosing a major, there are circumstantial considerations that influence how the student-athletes might appraise the decision to work within the structure of balancing school and sport. Specifically, Benaiah shared a dilemma that he navigated in terms of continuing sport since he graduated early and finished his athletic eligibility while attending graduate school. As a graduate student, his class schedule changed and his focus for sport changed because he had begun to seriously consider post-athletic career options. The expectation of being present for all athletic activities remained, but Benaiah acknowledged that pouring more energy into post-collegiate plans, such as career exploration and internships. Therefore, he chose to retire his athletic play during his final year of eligibility, but he reflected on how being in graduate studies rather than undergraduate studies creates nuance for this quandary:

In undergrad, you have to consider a lot, right? You have to count the cost, right? Do you want to walk away from the scholarship? Do you want to, you know, pay your way through, you know, however many more years you have left? Versus, you know, me being in a situation in grad school where, you know, I essentially have the leverage, right? I pay my way through that semester of grad school, right? So, if I left, I didn't have to pay anyone back. I was essentially volunteering my time at this point. So, that's kind of how the two would've looked versus me being in that position in grad school versus being in that position in undergrad (592–599).

Given this perspective, Benaiah conveyed how choosing an academic major and a class schedule were sacrificial actions. While having the decision to carve out your own path and pursuing all activities of interests would be desirable, there is a cost. For the student-athletes, that cost might include sacrificing the decision to pursue exactly what they want with respect to academic and career planning so that they can continue to remain a student at the institution and play their respective sport. Ultimately, for some student-

athletes, not attending college was a graver consequence than lacking full autonomy in directing their college experience.

Theme 3: Connection through Identifiable Spaces

Given the limitations of autonomy, the participants identified unique experiences of connection within their college experiences. Even though sport was their primary backdrop, they wanted to feel connected to their campus. Furthermore, this sense of connection influenced the direction and path they pursued as their undergraduate experiences ended and they were transitioning into the world of work. Strayhorn (2019) indicated that belongingness reinforces a person's sense of mattering and having support. In many cases, belongingness can be affected by a person's identification with an environment or a person's ability to see people like them in spaces they occupy. For the participants, belongingness became a focal point as college commenced and continued to be significant as they left school and moved into the work environment. As a result, the participants described the significance of connection in the following aspects: campus belongingness, post-college sport pursuits, measuring up away from sport, and relatability within work opportunities.

Campus belongingness. As the participants navigated college and transitioned to post-college endeavors, their values of connection were established through their campus experiences. In particular, the participants illustrated differences in belongingness based on whether they attended an HBCU or a PWI. As they discussed their college experiences of belongingness, they were formulating how they might want to seek and create belongingness within the workplace. Within the PWI spaces, the participants communicated the challenges of fitting in and finding community. Nas shared that

transitioning into college was difficult due to the unfamiliar environment, treatment differences, and demographic change:

I would say just culturally, moving Philadelphia to a small town, well, a big town in Kansas City or Overland Park, Kansas, and adjusting to being in a predominantly white institution. Different culture and different vibe of people, and then, from transferring to [my Division 1 university] as well. And still, culture shock, never been around that many white people in my life in one setting. Very uncomfortable at times, because of the racism that I've seen or been a part of experience and being exposed to that (23–28).

Similarly, B recalled a similar aspect of shifting from a predominantly Black environment while growing up to a predominantly White space during college:

But it's like, being African American or Black, you're pretty much always going to stand out, because going to [my Division 1 university], we call it a PWI, predominantly White institution. You're going to stand out because there's not a lot of us there, you know. So, you might have a class of 50, and there is only like, maybe five Black people in there. So, but as far as fitting in on the campus, I mean, they gave us pretty good respect. But, I mean, certain groups, you know, they did have some prejudice against us, and, you know, kind of label us like cocky, since we play sport. So, and maybe, you know, they kind of say certain things inappropriate about us, even the coaches too (114–118).

Given these reflections, Nas and B identified that their experiences of navigating college were difficult because they did not see much representation of themselves. In many ways, this was the first time in which they encountered spaces where there were few people who looked like them. Furthermore, their connection to their colleges was dampened by the intolerant comments they received. Through these experiences, there was a sense that their presence was not welcomed or viewed in a favorable way.

In addition to these unfavorable experiences, the participants reiterated how their sense of belongingness occurred within athletic circles or seemed limited to athletics. John indicated that his identity outside of athletics did not seem to have a place, especially by stating, “At least here, I didn't feel like I fit in outside of teammates until I

got to grad school, and I met young Black professionals as a group (269–270).”

Similarly, Eric echoed these sentiments by saying:

I knew I would fit in just because of football. Like, if I didn’t play football, I wouldn’t have fit in there, you know what I’m saying. I probably would have found my little clique or my group of people (239–240).

Also, B added to this notion of finding community within a smaller group during his college experience:

I mean, we [as in football student-athletes] fit in, but we kind of stuck out at the same. But I will say with being Black, we kind of grouped together. We stood together, kind of came together on campus (121–123).

Given these perspectives, there were clear indications that community would exist within athletic circles, but there was no guarantee that community among the general population would materialize. As a result, the participants emphasized that they had to create their own sense of community within a familiar environment to feel connected.

However, there was also a nuanced perspective of campus belongingness related to sport. Jamer felt the connection as a student-athlete, but he seemed distrustful of his sense of belongingness given the demographic representation within the campus:

When it came to [my Division 1 university], that was a predominantly White school, right? It was mostly White kids there...And, it was a learning experience, because—not that you had to change your identity to fit in. We were already accepted for being an athlete, but I guess my view was: “Why aren’t there more Black kids here?” And I’m not just talking about athletes. I’m just talking about general students. There were a lot of times where I was uncomfortable. I mean, imagine sitting in a lecture with 400 people and you’re the only Black person in a 400-person lecture at a major school that has 20,000 people (232–244).

Similarly, Nas shared this perspective during his time at his Division 1 university, but his view on belongingness was established by his community college experience and persisted as he entered his Division 1 institution:

[I didn't feel comfortable] just being on a campus where only athletes were Black. Most of them were Black. Football and basketball and track were Black kids. So, I struggled with that. I'm like, "How is it only Black students are athletes? Where are the regular Black students at on campus that we can see, that we can touch? It can't be just us. It's a small population. So that was alarming to me (294–298).

Despite building connections within athletic spaces, belongingness was a siloed experience. Specifically, the participants primarily saw reflections of themselves within athletic spaces. By seeing a limited representation of Black students within the general student population, the implicit message was that Black students are present for athletic purposes. Therefore, there was an inherent sense that they did not belong because very few, if any, people looked like them outside of their respective team or the athletic world. Ultimately, the PWI experience appeared to suppress their sense of belonging.

In contrast, the HBCU experience seemed to be more welcoming and comfortable for participants that attended these types of institutions. Benaiah and Tony highlighted different experiences with belongingness that eased the challenge of building connections during college. For Tony, there was a similarity to Nas in that he attended another institution prior to attending his Division 1 university. However, he transitioned from a PWI to an HBCU, which provided a contrasting experience:

So, being [at my Division 1 university] was different, but it was something I come from. You know, I come from all predominately Black. But when I went to [an NAIA university], it was definitely a culture shock. Like, it was definitely something new. It was something I wasn't used to, the way people talked to me, the way I felt. I kind of feel out of place a little bit because I wasn't getting the actual right attention that I needed, at least on that campus. But then again, I also felt like it was all eyes on me. It was only like at the time like 5% Blacks (196-203).

As shared in the previous reflections, the experience at a PWI spotlighted Tony as Black person due to the small population of Black students and did not allow him to feel connected based on how he was treated. However, Tony emphasized that being at an

HBCU brought familiarity, which was unlike his initial college experience. Tony advanced the distinction of attending an HBCU compared to a PWI with a positive recollection of his experience:

At an HBCU, man, it was kind of like I felt like a king. I mean I encourage other races to go. Like, they are going to take care of you. They are going to make sure you got everything you need, not saying the other schools are not. But the love and support that they give out, you know what I'm saying; they're not going to charge you an arm and a leg to go to their school. They're going to try to work with you, the financial team, because it's all Black people. They want to help other Black people. So, I would prefer an HBCU (286–292).

To complement this perspective, Benaiah recalled his adjustment to college while attending an HBCU:

So, I think it was easy for me to fit in, obviously, because it was an HBCU, right? So, coming from Chicago, a predominantly black school, right, and going to an HBCU, which is just a—let's say a high school on steroids, right? Predominantly black. I think it was an easy transition (275–277).

These reflections illustrate the novelty of navigating an environment in which the participants feel like they identify with students and personnel in the environment. For both Tony and Benaiah, attending offered familiarity even in an unknown space. For starters, the HBCU included more people that looked like them. In addition, this environment also seemed to remind them of their home environments, which appeared to be consequential since they were away from home while attending college. Therefore, Tony and Benaiah's experiences conveyed that attending an HBCU might be helpful in building connections beyond the athletic space. As a reflection of this perspective, Nas discussed how he would have made different choice about college in hindsight:

I'm telling every kid to go to a school that fits them culturally, first and foremost. I didn't do that. I didn't have that experience. You could tell from probably throughout this interview, my experience at [my Division 1 university] was terrible. It's not one of those—I would never go back. I would never go work back there. I don't have a connection with that school at all. My coaches and my

teammates were the reason why I committed to that school. And if I could do it, again, I would say go to—it doesn't have to be a black college. I would like for kids to go to a black college, because I think it's black professors on the campus where you can get real life information. Not saying that white or others can't give you the real, but they can't speak to certain experiences that we have as Black people...Go where you fit or where you see yourself fitting in with the culture and people that can help you build those organic relationships to better yourself and understanding the world instead of just a job, because I think it's bigger than that. College is bigger than that, in my opinion, and being connected to people who care about you to help you grow mentally, physically. So, that's one thing I would go back or just you know. I wouldn't kill my identity of just being an athlete or just feeling like, "Man, I don't even know these people. Like, I'm just here (868-884)."

Though Nas had not experienced life as a college student of an HBCU, he proposes that attending an HBCU would have been a choice to consider. Furthermore, he indicated that future Black male student-athletes should consider black colleges, or at least, identify institutions that would affirm their experiences and provide connection beyond the athletic environment. Through these types of environments, student-athletes could cultivate different domains of their experience, which could shape post-college outcomes.

Post-college sport pursuits. Due to the connection to sport and limited interaction outside of the athletic environment, the participants reflected on how they viewed and pursued their post-college endeavors. In many cases, considering a continuation of sport following college was common. For some, sport comprised a lifelong aspiration due to their interest and enjoyment. Therefore, the goal always included sports beyond college and that was the objective throughout the experience. For example, Jamer communicated how he entered and where his vision lied as he was matriculating:

So, essentially, I went to college to play football, right? And get my degree. I didn't know what that was going to be in, though. So, that was like the main dream, the main goal, right? It's to go to the NFL. That's your dream entering college. So, to be honest, I wasn't really focused on a career like that. When

you're 18 and you have a dream that big, you think you're going to go. You believe in yourself, right? I wasn't really career-driven, but I knew I had to get a degree (132–137).

Similarly, John highlighted a comparable focus for his post-college preparation and vision:

What I prepped for [after college] was being an NFL athlete. And I think I truly did. I took as much as I could and just developed what I thought was necessary to be an NFL athlete (410–412) ...That's what I put my focus into, because it was also not just because of that reason. But, also, my family situation, I knew that, you know, just a couple of years of doing that, of playing pros, just changes everything. So, sadly, that's what I thought was my only way. I hadn't seen jobs that could create that type of change at that time that could create the type of change in your family's life that could take them basically up into a different class. So, that's what I wanted to do (415–420).

Furthermore, Eric emphasized how his identity and talent created the context for contemplating post-college plans:

[Being a Black male student athlete] definitely did [influence my career path], because like I said, I limited myself as to like what I was already going to do based on like my lifestyle and how college went for me. If I wasn't as good at football as I thought I was, I would have maybe taken more consideration to my real career (683-686).

In these three examples, there are clear indications that maintaining sport beyond college was a clear objective. For Jamer, the goal was simple: Pursue the NFL because that is always where he had envisioned himself beyond college. For John, the pursuit of professional sports was more about providing for his family. For Eric, the identification with sport and not having much connection to anything outside of athletics suggested that football needed to be part of his post-college future. While their reasons were different, the familiarity with sport and having a connection to this activity shaped how they approached post-college plans. Sport brought stability because they were already investing ample time and energy into this endeavor. Moreover, they had awareness of

their abilities within sport despite the prospects of achieving a professional playing career.

In another light, competitive sport brought a sense of stability amid transition, but it was not the only consideration with respect to the post-college transition. Even though achieving a professional playing career was within reach, competing within their sport did not serve as the only option for some participants. In some instances, sport-related roles without being a professional athlete were considered. In other cases, leaving sport overall was a probable path. For example, B and Nas highlighted the predicament of whether to pursue sports in some capacity after college or relinquish sport-related pursuits. B described how his athletic identity and academic endeavors shaped his outlook:

I mean, as a black football player, your first thought is the NFL. Next, they got the Canadian League, XFL, maybe even coaching. You could think about doing different things like that. And those like kind of one lane that you can go to, if you want to still stick with the sports, maybe even personal trainer, different things like that dealing with muscle groups, or you can go into whatever you're studying. In my position, it was mathematics, it was like be a math teacher, banker, accountant, different things like that. So that's kind of the different paths that I was thinking about taking (522-527).

Nas shared a related approach as he thought about post-college plans, especially given the opportunity of attending college:

To be honest with you, I felt like going to college, I knew it was a possibility I wouldn't go to the NBA. That was always in the back of my head, and I was always the best player on my team and stuff. So, I really tried to shy away from basketball in the sense of just having my own identity and being realistic about my expectations. My father and grandfather, and I had a lot of coaches that said that education should be in the forefront. And, not just reading a book or anything like that, but educating yourself, and you know, leaning on people to help you mature and grow. So, I kind of wanted that balance (90-96).

Through these reflections, Nas and B showed similar mindsets as they considered post-college plans. For Nas, sport was possible because he was competing at the highest collegiate level, but the notion of attending college unlocked possibilities and belief that sport was not the only future option. In addition, he had external support that prompted him to balance his perspective about post-college plans. For B, he considered his primary endeavors during his undergraduate experience. Given his identity as a student-athlete, pursuing options related to his major held equal value to his athletic-related options. Ultimately, their involvement in Division 1 sports positioned them to achieve professional playing careers, but there were additional influences that encouraged possibilities in which sport was not involved.

While competing at the professional level was a common aspiration, everyone did not receive that opportunity. However, sport-related opportunities emerged, which allowed continued connection to sport. Though these opportunities created avenues to remain involved in an activity they loved, there were unique consequences. Nas, Eric, and John communicated that remaining in sport without competing as a professional athlete served different purposes. Nas disclosed that he could have competed in professional basketball overseas for two years, but he commenced his post-college experience in the world of work. Furthermore, Nas described that his professional career involved several transitions with sports agents and opportunities to play. During this period, Nas shared that he would transition back and forth between competing at the professional level and working as a therapeutic support staff member within a school so that he could continue providing for himself. As a result, Nas indicated that shifting between these two opportunities was a tumultuous process:

I was in denial, because I didn't believe that [a professional playing career was not in my long-term future]. I would still work out. I would still play in [recreational adult] leagues just to keep my body in shape. I was doing my own research and my own homework on agents or just anybody that could help me get overseas. I was like, "I'm not ready to put down the basketball." So, like I said, I did my homework. I reached out to coaches or just friends that were playing overseas and seeing who they could connect me with. So, I never really gave it up of trying to chase [a professional playing career]. I just used the therapeutic support staff [job] to pay bills, and you know, just have money in my pocket. But, as soon as that next year came, or opportunity, I was gone. That was my whole mindset. I got to get back to playing (643–650).

Although Nas held this perspective, the professional playing opportunities did not materialize, which prompted a shift. During this shift, Nas was met with a new opportunity to maintain his connection to sport:

So, when I was finally done, I got approached with the opportunity to coach high school basketball as an assistant coach at one of the top high schools in the city, well in Pennsylvania. So, that opportunity was amazing! That made me feel like I can still play and be around like young kids. And you know, being around a top program, you got six coaches, so it was very competitive. It was very entertaining at times, and [to] help these young individuals grow as people and tell them my experiences and what to look out for was a good transition for me (705-710).

Given these reflections, Nas seemed to be pursuing longevity within sport as a professional athlete, but the lack of opportunity forced him to change his focus. However, he remained connected to sport to extend athletic identity and continue his involvement in an activity that he enjoyed and envisioned being a part of his post-college life. Through this process, Nas seemed to find value in this transition as it offered a gradual end to sport given that his choice about continuing professional athletic play was shortened due to deselection. This process appeared to help him accept that sport as a professional athlete would not exist in his future.

In contrast, Eric and John had brief connections to sport without a professional athletic playing career, but their journeys were unlike the experience for Nas. Eric shared

that he endured several injuries during college, which created challenges to display his talents for professional teams to consider him. Upon recognizing that his professional playing aspirations were nonexistent, he found an opportunity to help a former coach with youth football, but discovered his internal conflict interfered with a successful transition:

[I started coaching] just wanting to be around the game, and just you know, that connection. Like I said, when I first stopped playing, it was an immediate, like cut off. Like, "Okay, you can't go to the fieldhouse, no more. You can't even come up in here and get a workout. You can't get in the cold tub." None of that. So, for me, it was cold turkey. So, it even got to the point when I realized my mental state was getting kind of like played with it, because I was playing Madden all day. So that's when you realize: "Like damn, I'm really yearning for this football thing." But I don't really realize I'm playing a video game just to make myself, my appetite. So, I was doing that. Then I realized, like, "Man, I'm gonna see if I could go help my high school coach out." So, I did that, coached for two years, but like I said, I had to cut that out, too, because that was so time consuming. The money is not good at all. You work for like six months and you get like a thousand dollars. So, that wasn't worth it. Then I was spending like most of my evenings like doing football. So, I felt like I was back into the student athlete role, but I ain't even playing (638-648).

Comparably, John navigated a swift transition from competitive athletic play to the world of work. He indicated having a medical condition that kept him from playing, which was discovered following being drafted. John expressed that the news was concerning and challenging to process given that his career would end prematurely, but not on his terms. As a result, he received a front office role, which allowed him to remain connected to his sport in a different capacity. However, John highlighted that the transition was even more challenging beyond processing his curtailed career and medical concern. The pain of not competing at the professional level was exacerbated by his proximity to the sport:

Months after [the transition out of professional athletic play] happening, you know, I'm right above where the team works out. So, I can feel the bass in the music right below me. You know, I'm just hearing whistle blows and folks chanting and yelling and having a good time. Seeing them going out to practice

like [through the] windows and everything. I had no idea how to take that. It was just like life would be thrown in my face every day. And, so yeah, I didn't want to sit with that, you know. But as far as the transition after these things were happening, I just didn't know what to do. I didn't know what to like, "Is this my passion? No." Because clearly, I just told y'all what I was passionate about three months ago. Like, that didn't change in three months (496-503).

While John and Eric experienced sport-related career opportunities following college, their experiences were unfavorable. Given their aspirations for the future, post-college sport participation not including a professional athletic playing career did not seem ideal. Although remaining connected with sport was an easy transition, the opportunities complicated how they made peace with athletic play not being part of their professional experiences. Their involvement in sport-related careers energized a longing for athletic playing careers that were indefinite and unpromising. In addition, the compounding factor of health-related concerns complicated the transition into a sport-related career without athletic play. This notion suggests that having a gradual end to sport seems valuable when a medical-related or an injury-related reason terminated athletic play. Ultimately, maintaining sport beyond college outside of a professional athletic playing career generated variant experiences based on the context of the transition.

Measuring up away from sport. Although transitioning from college to a sport-related career without athletic play might ease the process of moving on from sport, all student-athletes might not have access to these career options. Therefore, finishing college might result in full termination of sport involvement. Consequently, there were participants who left college and entered unfamiliar spaces for work because there was no connection to sports. This transition presented new challenges of fitting in and learning new cultures. Despite the newness of navigating an environment unrelated to sport, the participants expressed different approaches and obstacles for enduring this transition.

One unique experience was Benaiah's reflection about entering the workforce after attending an HBCU. While the HBCU experience provided familiarity and ease with college belongingness, Benaiah recognized that the demographic composition was not reflective of the corporate sector:

As I progressed through college, I began to understand that that was one of my gaps. One of my blind spots was I have not interacted with multicultural people, right? I haven't built relationships with Whites, or Asians, or what have you. It was just I was stuck in this box my entire life (277–280).

Therefore, the HBCU experience was good for the college matriculation process.

However, there were concerns about whether this experience would negatively impact work experiences and career opportunities. Benaiah also followed up his observation with further inquiry:

I started to think like, "How do I become successful?" Because, you know, when you go into the corporation, right? Or, if I meet someone, they're White, right? How can I talk to them? How can I relate to them? So, "how did I fit in [at college]?" And, I think I fit in, you know, obviously great when you consider the demographics, right? But when you think of, you know, like long term or matriculating, and you know, being a part of organizations and organizations competing with different schools, you begin to, you know, see the competitions, and fill that gap. And say, you know, "Did I seclude myself to this one demographic?" So that became a challenge for me later on (281–289).

Given this perspective, Benaiah acknowledged that having familiarity and connection during college was helpful, but he wondered whether this experience stunted him in preparation for the world of work. His inquiry acknowledged the uneasiness of not being able to guarantee that the work environment would resemble the HBCU environment. Also, Benaiah's reflection pondered whether having experiences within multicultural settings would be necessary for a successful transition into the world of work.

Though Benaiah wondered whether his college environment might affect connecting with others in the work setting, Eric and Jamer highlighted how their work

experiences have not validated them. Specifically, Eric reflected on his appearance and how he feels about his reception among professionals in the world of work:

I feel like I don't [fit into the work environment]. Honestly, just being like a black male with dreads, you know what I'm saying, kind of tall, got the beard, it's one of those things where they say like, "If you were in a room full of me in there, would you stand out?" And I feel like I would. And, I feel like, I'm not the smartest, but I feel like I know how to represent myself like I kind of know how to talk. It's one of those things where it's just like you just don't do too much, you know what I'm saying. I was raised right, you know what I'm saying: "Yes, sir. No, sir." But as far as like, being in a business room with certain people, I just don't feel like I would fit in (821–826).

Similarly, Jamer emphasized presentation and how that affects fitting in and connecting within the work environment:

[To fit in, I felt like I had to be perfect. That means] I would say just trying to avoid as many mistakes as possible, right? It's about being as professional as possible. It's about not using any slang, right? So, when you talk about identity, right, I guess is it, "Am I really being myself? (1007–1012)" ...It is a little bit uncomfortable when you have to be "professional" at times, because it's not that you aren't professional. It's just you are who you are. You may say, you may act a certain way because that's just who you are, but you have to be "perfect" to make sure that you're not making another individual uncomfortable (1019–1022).

Therefore, the challenge that Jamer and Eric posed was not concerned with whether they had relational experiences with people whose identities might be most predominant in the world of work. Instead, they were concerned with whether they would be embraced for how they appearance in stature, grooming, personality, and communication style. Feeling connected to the work environment was contingent upon whether they could be affirmed as their authentic selves. Though a company might evaluate their skills and abilities, Jamer and Eric had equal concern for how the company would appreciate and value their personhood.

Although fitting in from a personhood standpoint can be a challenge, Nas offered a different approach in which he presents his true self when entering work environments:

Now, I don't make [myself] fit in. I come as authentic as myself. I don't code switch anymore. I used to do that in college to try to fit in with, I guess, my coworkers because I think basketball is a job. So, I don't do that anymore to try to get them to like me. I am who I am. And really, just be intentional. I think when somebody hires you, I think you have to come with you, because it's a rigorous process in each individual opportunity. So, I don't do that anymore. I really just come as myself. And now they want me around. Like, I just got a note from my principal at my school when I was only there for a day and a half. She wrote me a nice letter and I carried the note around with me, like just to read it and go back to it. And I'm like, the value of people. Like, I don't feel like I did a lot to be honest. It was only a day in a half, but I guess the impact was there. And I think that reaffirms: "Just be yourself (849-858)."

While Eric and Jamer highlighted their sense of self and presentation being invalidated as a means of determining whether they fit in, Nas approached connection from the lens of occupying spaces where he is validated. The way in which he presents himself is important to who he is and allowing himself to exude his true essence seemed critical to how he operates in addition to affirming his sense of connection. Through his college experience, he acknowledged that assimilating to the environment was his approach. However, his brief work experience within a grade school asserted that he could present himself in a genuine way and build workplace connections. In his case, presenting his authentic self is important to assuring that the work environment and the people within it appreciate him.

In addition to fitting in based on presentation, connection was also reflected in their abilities being affirmed. Though they might have just begun a position, there was concern about performance and how their work would be viewed given their identity. In particular, B shared that his introduction to the workplace prompted heightened attention to his efforts:

So, first, it's kind of like you feel a little bit uneasy, lack of confidence, because you don't have the experience, or nobody ever taught you or coach you up. So, you may be talking to a supervisor, and you may feel real nervous...But, starting out, I was like nervous. I'm Black. I'm in this corporate setting and nobody kind

of looked like me. I had to be on my best behavior. I can't make any mistakes or they're just going to fire me. And that's kind of how I was feeling first coming out as a black athlete (642–649).

In the same light, Benaiah shared his observation of having to show himself approved of the work positions he has fulfilled when he shared, “Honestly, I always felt like the underdog, right? In particular, when I joined [the workforce], just feeling [like] not the top pick (768–769).” Though this was the initial feeling, Benaiah used this impression to fuel his focus in the workplace:

I think this is my own mental state. I always feel like my back is against the wall. Like, I always have something to prove, which I don't think it's a bad thing. I think, for me, that allowed me to not get content. That allowed me to, you know, drive, and push forward, right (775–778)? ...In particular, with me being a Black male, you know, in [my current] leadership position, you know, you want to make sure to position yourself as [worthy] and just not take advantage of that [opportunity and] make them reconsider any decision they may have had (784–787).

With these reflections, connection is solidified in demonstrating one's abilities. While coexisting with others and presenting authentic identities are important attributes to workplace connections, feeling competent and capable within the work setting seemed just as significant. For Benaiah and B, showing that they were suitable workers for their career roles ensured approval from their counterparts. Without the respect of their counterparts, they might not have a keen sense of connection at their workplace. Overall, connection to the work environment was contingent upon receiving genuine acceptance from others and meeting workplace standards, such as collegiality and performance.

Relatability within work environments. Although the external validation of one's abilities, authentic presence, and harmony with others facilitated connection, the participants valued joining a relatable work environment. Given that their college experiences offered familiarity through sport, transitioning to work environment in which

they experienced familiar aspects of themselves fostered connection. Particularly, Nas, Tony, Eric, and John discussed how working in environments in which there is a sense of relatability generates connection. For Nas, Tony, and Eric, relatability was viewed from the perspective of the population they served within their roles. Specifically, they cherished working with youth who looked like them and wanting to mentor individuals who were participating in developmental activities like when they were younger. For example, Tony discussed not seeing a future within sport because there were initial signs of what his future would hold:

Early on, I saw it. I'm probably going to be somebody's teacher. I'm probably going to work at a school, but I was okay with it because it was going to give back to youth. It's going to give back to the youth. It's going to make y'all see a different point of life because to have somebody that's been through the same things that actually found their way out. It's situations you can't tell me I haven't been in, life and death, no matter what it is. You can't tell me. I've seen it. So, it's like I can show you a different way. I can show you how to move where you ain't got to go through that way, you know. And I can relate to you. When you tell me, "Oh this!" Even when I worked in the schools that I did in Chicago, they tell me or whatever. And, it is like, "You know everything." And, that was because I was in your shoes (635–642) ... So, yeah, I just want to be able to give the knowledge I have back to the Black young youth and let them see like, "Dang, bro, you got kicked out of school? And you still—but you never gave up. What was it? Was it that you never gave up?" And that's why I want to give back to the youth because they need to hear it from a Black brother that's from where they're from (644–648).

Similarly, Nas discussed what potential job opportunities he was considering prior to pursuing a professional athletic playing career based on relatability:

[I was considering a] mentoring program [prior to being a professional athlete]. Just being a director or something of life a Boys and Girls Club. Well, yeah, I would say that I feel like where I'm at now, current place, it ties back into all the things that I was doing. Connection with kids, and you know, just giving somebody a face where they can be themselves. And I think being a counselor. I think that was one of the things that I wanted to do, a social worker (513–517) ... [And, I went to college] to get an opportunity to bring something back, whether it's financial, or it's me doing something to help try to change other people's lives (530–531).

Given Nas and Tony's experiences, they sought environments in which they could impact youth that shared their experiences. In particular, the connection to the possible work opportunities was driven by knowing the environment in which they would be working and having lessons to share. Also, Nas and Tony's desire to work in settings with youth who resembled them would give the youth a person with whom they could connect. Though they would be seeking the opportunities, the outcome of relatability was reciprocal for themselves and the population they served.

Though Eric held similar beliefs about relatability as Nas and Tony, his experience with pursuing workplace relatability was slightly nuanced. As shared before, Eric coached following the end of his collegiate career, but his experience of coaching was complicated by his desire to continue his athletic playing career:

I always wanted to just give back to the kids that play ball, but it's like at the same time, I tried. I tried to coach for two years, man. And just, I still felt like a player. Man, I was wearing my helmet to practice, running with the kids. So, it was one of those things where it's like, I was doing them a disservice because it's like most student athletes do go back and teach their kids. But it's like at the point I was in my life, I still felt like I can play ball. So, I was too busy worried about myself, and giving me that yearning, that feeling that I want to put my helmet on and to run around. And, also, I'm doing it with the kids, so it's fun [for them] having a coach like that. But yeah, I was doing them a disservice because I really wasn't teaching them the game how a real coach should have been. Then, I felt like I'm going through the same thing that my college coaches did to me (622–630).

With this perspective, Eric illustrated how he valued connecting with the youth because they shared an experience or background with which he could relate. In this case, football was the point of similarity. However, his relatability to the youth he served appeared to resemble over-identification, which he felt was unproductive for the youth. While he valued the shared identity and experiences with the youth he coached, the connection

could not persist because of the potential consequences for them. He wanted to build connections in the workplace, but not at the expense of repeating detrimental behaviors.

In contrast, John shared how he wanted to work with people with whom he could identify, but he was unable to achieve this sense of connection. Even though John was unable to pursue a professional playing career, he was still within the athletic world.

However, he recognized that this space did not reflect his identities:

Yeah, I didn't feel a connection anywhere. Like, I was just there. Like, okay, no one in this office was a former student athlete or you got to maybe one. Like, typically the executives, like the GM was a former athlete. The business operations person was a former athlete, I believe. But for the most part, like the general body of the office, they're not athletes. They know somebody who knows somebody. And that's what I was learning. Or, just like, "This is who runs like what athletes do or what athletes want to participate in and what deals are kind of brought to athletes. It's like, it's not athletes (595–601).

Even though he terminated his professional athletic playing career, John was anticipating interactions with former student-athletes or professional athletes because the role was within the sports industry. Furthermore, he shared reflections about not feeling connected even without seeing former athletes in his work environment:

And not just athletes. It's not Black people, because if we're talking about being with an NFL team, we know that data shows 76 [percent], 77 [percent], something like that, or whatever it is within the NFL is Black, NFL athletes are Black. But then you get into the office spaces and it's maybe one [percent or] two percent Black. Maybe. I'm pushing on the two percent for sure (601–604).

John entered a sport-related space where he expected his salient identity as a former athlete to be represented, but he discovered that former athletes were not well-represented outside of the athletic playing environment. Furthermore, John recognized that his racial identity was not reflected within the sport-related office space despite the sports team and sports league being comprised of predominantly Black athletes. This reality was surprising and peculiar to John because there were so few people who associated with the

most visible identities represented in the sport. Therefore, John did not feel connected because he did not see himself reflected in the work environment he occupied. Though relatability in the workplace was not affirmed in John's case, his reaction to the reflected demographics conveyed he valued a work environment where his salient identities were not underrepresented. Given these reflections, connection is facilitated in a workplace where one's self-concept is reflected because it offers familiarity during the transition to work and creates space for authentic appearances.

Theme 4: Village-Based Support

As the participants matriculated through college and transitioned into the world of work, connection was critical to entering new environments. Though a sense of connection created security, the participants emphasized the need for support to ease the transitional process. Since professional athletic play was not part of their long-term post-college endeavors, the participants were accessing novel spaces when joining the world of work. Furthermore, their backgrounds as first-generation college students positioned them with limited knowledge about navigating college and moving into the workforce. Consequently, the participants needed support to navigate their intra-college and post-college experiences. Without any support, the participants were vulnerable to increased transitional challenges. Therefore, the transition into the world of work was influenced by the following resources: interpersonal networks and intrapersonal skill development.

Interpersonal networks. Throughout their intra-college and post-college journeys, the participants identified different groups of people that were important to how they navigated the transitional process. In some cases, there were people who had direct and indirect influences on the participants' journeys through college into the world of

work. In other instances, there were specific voids that the participants acknowledged as potential support for easing the transition. For example, Nas and Benaiah discussed influences within their personal circles that shaped their outlook on post-college pursuits. Nas had encouragement from his family that helped shape his academic experience, which set the stage for post-college considerations:

[I received support from] my father, my grandfather, my mom, brother, of course. I had some friends that supported me as well, but they all played a different role in my life as far as support. So maybe, financially, it was my mom. Maybe, education was my father. Maybe, it was motivation from my grandfather. And, I had a couple of coaches that were very pivotal in my life, black men. And, telling me basically, like, focus on basketball, but focus on your education, because it's going to be over soon, whether you want it to or not. So, everybody played a different role. (337–342).

Though Nas did not receive specific insight into career ideas, he received encouragement to keep his vision open to possibilities outside of sport. In his case, education held equal importance to sport according to his relatives with respect to his college matriculation. While his family members were not suggesting a premature termination of sport, they wanted Nas to consider the inevitable end of competitive athletic play and ways to pivot from this path.

Similarly, Benaiah had encouragement regarding his navigation of intra-college and post-college endeavors. However, his support offered more specific directions and considerations for his journey. Upon entering college, Benaiah had an idea of the path he wanted to pursue, which provided a foundation from which to build. As a result, Benaiah used his interpersonal resources to guide his focus and refine his path:

So, you know, ultimately, I wanted to deal with people. You know, I was very interested in starting my own business, entrepreneurship, and at the time, [my Division 1 university] did not have entrepreneurship. So, it kind of led me to the human resource concentration field. So, you know, just having, you know, distant relatives that I saw that was successful in business ventures (111–114).

In addition to the familial support, Benaiah discussed having non-familial support that helped him navigate school and beyond:

Honestly, there wasn't any guidance for myself or other black males, you know, during [high school], and I think [my high school friends and I] were fortunate because we were able to meet, you know, a mentor of mine, which I am still very close to until this day (41–44) ...[Since I lost my father earlier in high school], he took on that role of that father figure, confidant in which I could speak to him about anything (80–81).

Despite identifying as a first-generation college student, Benaiah had resources via family and mentors, which offered knowledge and lived realities that directed his vision for the future. Though he was the first in his family to navigate the college environment, there were viable examples within his family of potential outcomes he could pursue after college. In his case, he had some awareness of general desires for his career and received inspiration from his relatives about how he wanted to direct his aspirations. Furthermore, Benaiah's experience included the resource of a mentor with whom he built a relationship in high school. Given Benaiah's personal history, his mentor filled a vital role with respect to social support and assuring he could endure his collegiate journey. Ultimately, Benaiah's experiences conveyed how interpersonal investment influences the overall development of student-athletes and provides them with ample insight towards their future.

While Benaiah and Nas identified interpersonal support that helped them navigate their paths, the other participants did not cite similar experiences. Instead, they shared gaps in available resources and desires for changes, which could have reduced the challenges with transitioning into the world of work. In particular, Eric and B discussed

the potential value of mentorship and networks that could have aided in their transition to work. Specifically, Eric named significant voids in his professional development:

Yeah so, based on connections, I don't really know too many people. Like, I know the people off of love, but like, as far as real business connections and networking, that's something that I'm lacking (839–840).

In his experience, Eric noticed football allowed him to connect with many people due to his sport participation. However, Eric did not feel that he had lasting relationships beyond other people's interest in his football ability. This limitation indicated that Eric did not have favorable odds for navigating the career landscape upon leaving football.

Furthermore, Eric felt that his primary points of contact during his undergraduate experience were not viable resources:

I wish I had resources with just keeping a relationship with my coaches, and not letting how football affected that. I felt like, no matter how we play ball, I feel like it's still should have been love. And they could say it, but I didn't feel it (893–895).

Given the challenges of transitioning from sport into the world of work, Eric emphasized that having support from established professionals and coaches might have been helpful. From Eric's perspective, knowing current professionals would be good for networking purposes. Through these networks, there might be potential offers for a career opportunity or support with being connected to another person in the world of work. In addition, the coaches were a primary point of contact, which prompted Eric's belief that they would be invested in him as an athlete and a human. However, the absence of these connections instilled the belief that he was lacking a critical resource for a successful transition.

On the other hand, B highlighted the importance of mentorship. In his eyes, mentorship would have provided insight into available opportunities and how to pursue

career options. In particular, B named mentorship in school and the workplace as desirable resources for navigating his journey:

I would definitely have liked a mentor in college that kind of, you know, just helped me out and just made sure I focused on school and different things like that. And, provide me with the resources to maybe help my resume stand out with a career or you know how to get my foot in the door. Or, maybe—well, I wasn't able to do internships, but lead me in the right direction a little bit. And, even post college, you know, it would've been nice to have a mentor maybe in the workplace, different things like that. But it's like, when you're in an entry level position, you know, you got your supervisor, but all they worry about is, you know, pretty much numbers, numbers, numbers. Like they just trying to make a quota so they can keep a job or so they can get a bonus at the end of the year. And it's like, it's not a lot of genuine people that, well, I haven't run into. I know they're out there, but I haven't experienced that in my position (509-514).

For B, the mentorship would have offered guidance and direction so that he could have a successful transition. The role of mentorship might have provided him with insight and soft skills in which he could exhibit his capabilities and personality. Also, mentorship could prepare him for identifying and pursuing higher-paying jobs:

I think time or experience is a factor, [in terms of feeling like there is a ceiling for my career future]. Guidance, like mentorship, [is another factor], because maybe if your parents was like, maybe a doctor or dentist, they'd be able to, you know, groom you a little bit more towards that pathway or even grooming a little more to be in a more elite, job profession. But being the first person to go to college, you know, there's nobody that I can really ask in my family, like, “What kind of career path when I'm looking for jobs, you know?” They can't tell me where to go to find those elite jobs, or how to obtain those jobs. Or what do I need to do to obtain those jobs? So that's why I say a ceiling. It's just a lack of knowledge or lack of network (481-487).

Given the backgrounds of first-generation college students, there are challenges with exposure and experiential familiarity. B contended that there are limitations for career advancement due to lack of insight regarding career possibilities and directions for seeking different options. Through mentorship, B conveyed that he might have more access to prestigious career choices. With these perspectives, the participants illustrated

the importance of interpersonal resources for guidance, direction, inspiration, and reassurance as they transitioned into the world of work. Lacking interpersonal resources seemed to result in a more difficult and demanding transitional process.

Intrapersonal skill development. While the participants valued their interpersonal networks, their journeys from collegiate sports into the world of work were marked by their efforts. Also, there were cases in which the participants received resources within and beyond their academic institutions that facilitated readiness for the transitional process. In other instances, there were disparities that could have been addressed, which might have created different outcomes while entering the workforce. For the participants, having insight into expectations and adjustments related to the transition would have eased this process. Therefore, the participants' individual development and maturation to navigate the transition from sport into the world of work could have benefitted from domain-specific resources: academic support, career support, and mental health support.

Academic support. As student-athletes, the balance of academics and athletics is an ongoing challenge. For the participants, their adjustment to college was a more complex process because they also identified as first-generation college students. Therefore, entering and navigating college included learning about an unfamiliar landscape while meeting academic and athletic demands without much vicarious insight from close relatives. Essentially, the participants indicated that they were learning through trial and error. However, the participants expressed challenges with receiving the necessary insight to be informed and equipped to make decisions that would benefit both their college and post-college matriculation. There were few reflections about helpful

experiences and resources, but Jamer highlighted academic advisors as valuable personnel in his journey:

Yeah, so we had like, academic advisors. So that's, you know, they were very supportive of us, you know. So, I had like my favorite one. His name was Lance, you know. And pretty much if I was falling behind academically or whatever, like he would always just be there. Just pick me up and just be like, "Yo, you got to get on the academics," things like that. So, I will say like, the academic advisors, they did a good job within. They were extremely supportive (604-608).

Though the journey through college involved much discovery, Jamer felt like his academic advisors helped him maintain his focus. Regardless of whether he was performing well in school or not, he felt supported to be diligent as a student. While this was one area in which there was consistent support, there were other instances in which there needed to be more support.

In general, the participants emphasized identifying as a first-generation college student as a primary hurdle to navigate. B captured the experience with an appropriate metaphor:

Man, it's a whole other world being a first-generation college student. Nobody told you how to how it was going to be, lack of experience, lack of knowledge. So, it's kind of like, you know, you're doing a job for the first time (179-181).

As a first-generation college student, there are no skills, previous experience, or social support to help with managing the transition into college. Furthermore, figuring out how to endure the journey of learning what will make for a successful college experience is the ongoing challenge. B's reflection is a sentiment that many of the participants held. They were oblivious to general tasks, milestones, and expectations that would contribute to them being successful within their major and understanding how their academic road would influence their post-college future. In particular, John discussed the conflict of performing well academically while competing in a demanding sport:

You know, this is not easy being a student-athlete and competing on a team that requires you to put in the absolute most out of every other sport. Because, not every other sport is putting in the amount of hours, let's just keep a buck, as like the football and basketball teams on those campuses. And, you know, if you look at grades, GPA's, and I won't say dropout rates, but kind of class scheduling, where there's a lot of lower GPAs, a lot of inconsistencies. It falls on those shoulders of those athletes who are in those sports. And it sucks, because it's like you wonder why that's where the most struggle is but require them to do the most. It's typically from people who look like myself and you, and just, it sucks because they want you to perform the best out of everybody with the least amount of resources (334-343).

As a football student-athlete, John cited having a demanding schedule. Consequently, his athletic schedule affected his academic diligence. Despite these competing interests, John indicated pressure to perform at a high level but felt that he was not supported in his efforts. Furthermore, he noted the academic performance of student-athletes within basketball and football as additional context for the necessity of quality academic support resources to navigate college and prepare for post-college plans.

In addition to balancing academic and athletic obligations, John and Jamer discussed the challenge of not having much direction related to majors and how they might affect future plans. Specifically, they asserted ideas regarding not having a streamlined process that could have helped with deciding on a major or having more knowledge to direct their paths through college. In John's case, there was hindsight realization of not having a set path:

So, all through college, I didn't know what a major was. So, I was just, I had no clue. I would hear people talk about their majors and what it was and minors. Like, I don't even know how that's like-I don't know what that means. Like, I have a sense of what it means, but, you know, if you're an accounting major, what does that actually mean? It sounds good. But, when I first got to school, I just thought I wanted to be a business major. Not knowing what a business major actually is and that there's all of these nuances at least at the university. And Business falls under a bunch of different categories. So, having no clue of what that actually meant all through college. And it's funny, when I look at my transcripts it's just, I've bounced all over the place, which to me, I didn't think mattered. You know, I

think I jumped maybe three or four majors not even knowing. Like, I knew that it was a shift, but not knowing like: (1) How that would set me back and (2) what the significance was of being steadfast in a major and knocking it out (137-148).

John was not informed about a critical part of his college experience, which resulted in aimless activities and indecisiveness. While navigating different majors might be a way for college students to determine their more desirable path, John was unaware of the fundamental elements of an academic major. Also, he did not seem to have guidance with respect to how indecision surrounding his major could shape future plans. Similarly, Jamer highlighted the consequences of not having much direction and wanting more guidance:

If I had more of a direct path, right, like in terms of like, what I wanted to do, you know, maybe a little bit more knowledge in terms of like, just academically. I don't know, man, you know, if I chose a different major, or maybe just had a little bit more support, or people in my life. You never know how things could turn out, you know, because I think a lot of a lot of success has to do with who you know, and the network that you build...Just reverting back to my college experience, I can say it can affect today, just because I feel like if I just had a little bit more knowledge, I wouldn't be in the situation I'm in today (888-895).

Though he was not blaming his current circumstances entirely on his college experience, Jamer acknowledged that his support for carving a pathway did not position him to be successful with transitioning. While there was no specific resource that could be pinpointed as the limiting factor in his post-college trajectory, Jamer indicated that his major and knowledge base would have provided more insight into how he could direct his path. Ultimately, having more awareness about his major and his interest in pursuing his course of study could have provided a clearer view for him once he transitioned out of sport.

Career support. In addition to academic support, the participants identified lacking insight surrounding career exploration. This gap in their development created

some challenges for knowing what options might be available. Furthermore, the limited time that could be devoted to non-athletic activities outside of school created additional barriers to acquiring the necessary information to have a different vision. For example, Benaiah described his outlook on available resources, which set the stage for his approach to matriculating:

So, it was very challenging in regard. So, it prepared me in a different way, where I had to kind of really take a step back and figure out, you know, how do I gain success post-football. And that's one of the things that, you know, I would debate or discuss with anyone. There's really no program if you're a student athlete, right? There's really no exit strategy for athletes in college, right? A college athlete is built, and the resources are given to them to be the best physical stud that they can possibly be, right. Although, people will say, "Hey, we have these different programs for you." But let's be honest, who's really taking advantage of those or how often are they brought up to the player? [They're] more so used for marketing strategy to get, you know, the donations or the funds that they're looking for (523-532).

In his eyes, Benaiah did not see a program or resource that could accommodate his experience and prepare him for life after college. The problem is that he was recruited to play football, but the arrangement for him coming to the university centered on athletic play. The consideration of navigating post-college endeavors was either subdued or nonexistent. Moreover, the discussion surrounding post-college preparation was a tool to lure him into his Division 1 institution, but there was not a structure in place to actualize these resources. Despite his acknowledgment of the structure, Benaiah pivoted his focus so that he could attempt to prepare himself despite not receiving adequate support to consider post-college plans. In particular, Benaiah used an extra year of athletic eligibility to pursue his master's degree while attempting to finish his athletic eligibility. He initiated his own efforts to access different resources:

I think just being in the School of Business was a major resource...The resources that I utilized such as Beta Gamma Sigma, I leveraged that to attend a leadership

summit, right, in Orlando, which was, you know, very multicultural and diverse...And then, using the MBA program to even study abroad where I went to Brazil...And, you know, just cultivating those relationships there, and your teachers seeing your potential...The Career Center, as well, it's a great resource, I utilized that sooner in terms of getting a template for resumes, you know, [getting] a jump drive with prototypes based on it to kind of prepare yourself and even have mock interviews (408-425).

While Benaiah might not have had a structure in place that directed him towards post-college preparatory resources, he sought the resources within his reach to help facilitate this process. Based on his experience, the opportunities he pursued emerged in the latter stages of his undergraduate experience and during his graduate experience. Given his academic performance within his academic department, he discovered opportunities to network and gain viable connections that might have been helpful in the future. Also, he used the Career Center as a resource to prepare for job opportunities. Although Benaiah had valuable career support, he pursued these opportunities through his own volition, because there was not much external support from coaches for his post-college preparation.

Though Benaiah was able to create a path that favored his development, his experience was not the norm. In most cases, the participants highlighted their lack of knowledge of what to expect when pursuing jobs. Upon reviewing their college experience, they had no means of knowing which jobs would suit them or even visualizing themselves in a specific career position. Particularly, John's sentiments about envisioning himself in the world of work provided an important foundation for post-college preparation. John stated, "I don't recall a time where I was like at a career fair or this event that [the campus was] hosting, where I was like, 'Yeah, I want to be like you (431-433).'" While a career fair might not be the only place where a student-athlete

would conclude that a certain career path is desirable to pursue, being exposed to different opportunities is critical to naming which career path might be suitable. John was clear that he did not find a career that made him excited about post-college endeavors. As a result, his reflection implied an important limitation to student-athletes' post-college preparation: job exposure. More specifically, the notion of internships was an important missing resource cited as a necessary component in transitioning from sport into the world of work.

For the participants, internships were the means for learning if a particular job or career path would be worthy to pursue. This avenue could help with either restricting or widening options because there would be some awareness of what the job might entail. However, Tony acknowledged the shortsighted vision of seeing the college experience as a four-year endeavor:

After college, it gets tough unless you got an intern[ship] lined up, which that means--See, I wasn't focused, you know, I really wasn't though. I just cared about getting a certificate to show people I did it. I wasn't focused. I never thought about after college (656-658).

When considering the immediate transition from college into the next phase, Tony discovered that no preparation for post-college life was disadvantageous. His focus was primarily on completing his degree, but he did not invest in how he might use his degree. Also, he did not indicate any resources that would have helped him direct his attention to post-college plans. For him, the motivation was centered on his academic eligibility for football and fulfillment of his degree obligations. However, he could have benefited from real-world experience to gain insight into where he could transition once football and college ended. Furthermore, Jamer highlighted potential plans that could have provided real-world experience during his college experience:

Yeah, I just wish I was able to learn a little bit differently. Like, wishing we were like, given a little bit more attention on like academics like, on like, actual career stuff. Like, even if it was an internship on campus, right. Or around the campus, there are like little cities, like, you know, Holyoke and stuff. Like Springfield. Just had us do something. Something where we had like a real-world experience, right? (1150-1154) - Jamer

Akin to Tony's reflection, Jamer felt that having some sort of real-world experience would have been beneficial to his post-college preparation. While he recognized the limitations of opportunities due to sport obligations. Jamer identified compromises in which he could have participated in an on-campus work opportunity or sought work experience through neighboring cities to where he attended college. However, those avenues were not available or explored.

Similarly, Benaiah discussed the regret of not being able to attain real-world work experience to help with the transition into the world of work:

[If I could relive my college experience, I would change] taking advantage of internships. Yeah, wholeheartedly believe, you know, obviously, you know, everyone wants to make it to the NFL. But, you know, let's be honest, those chances are slim, right? So, you have to find areas and be realistic with yourself, to develop yourself. I was always that guy that was like, "I'm not going to be 28, 29 years old trying to live out a dream of playing ball, right (800-803)?"

For Benaiah, the internship experience might have provided some balance with considering plans to pursue professional athletic playing career. He already acknowledged that being a professional football athlete would have been a short professional career had he pursued and achieved this path. However, he provided a captivating story regarding career exploration during his final year of athletic eligibility, which illustrated the obstacles he faced with attaining support for post-college planning:

So, this is one of the times where I kind of saw two people not really having the same goal in mind clash, right? I asked the coach you know, "Can I go to this career fair? Can I develop myself, right?" I'm preparing to leave. I'm preparing to start my career, and I really don't have any experience. And one of the many

regrets that I had was not doing an internship, you know, when I was in school, right? And, at the end of the day, I just decided to walk away during the season as a graduate assistant coach (500-505).

In this example, Benaiah confronted the conflicting interest of his athletic participation and his personal development. Though he valued being a student-athlete, Benaiah understood the importance of his preparation for post-college life. Consequently, his pursuit of this career development opportunity was essential to position himself to transition into the world of work. Yet, his ambition to prepare himself was not reciprocated with support from his coach, which forced him to forfeit his position on the team. While he was in the latter stages of his athletic eligibility, Benaiah's support, or lack thereof, towards his career planning reinforced the value of student-athletes having a structure that would invite them to seek and receive resources towards his post-college planning.

In another light, there were instances in which the student-athletes had an idea of career paths. They might pursue a major that interests them and would present respectable job opportunities. However, there is ambiguity because the student-athletes do not have awareness or lived experience to shape their career contemplation. B offered an intriguing explanation of how he considered his initial post-college pursuits:

The reason I was thinking about being an accountant is just because it was related to mathematics, and I was looking at, kind of, their salaries and different things like that. So, like "Maybe this would be a good career for me to get into." It was a couple other careers to like, I think it was called an actuary. Yeah, I think they made like, over \$100,000 a year. So, I was looking into that as well. But, you know, with football and school, you know, you don't have the time to maybe do internships and different things like that to kind of try out different careers, see if you like it or not, or get the experience (292-298).

Even though B indicated that his major shaped his consideration of careers, he was not sure whether those career paths would have been best for him. Based on his approach,

B's potential career paths were predicated on the salary and ability to take care of himself. However, he could not make a clear decision because he was not informed about what those career paths would entail. Consequently, the participants struggled with identifying prospective career plans because they lacked knowledge and adequate support to inform their decisions. While there are instances in which they pursued their own information, most participants did not know where to begin their search. Furthermore, the opportunities to engage in future career planning were limited or underemphasized. The participants acknowledged career-driven resources were essential for navigating the transition from sport into the world of work but felt they had reduced access.

Mental health support. Another component of the transition from sport into the world extended beyond practical resources, such as academic and career-based support. While those options help create strategies and game plans for transition, there is an emotional component attached to navigating college and post-college experiences. The participants cited mental health support as a valuable resource for enduring college and preparing for post-college plans. In particular, Nas discussed the difficulty of balancing his well-being and collegiate responsibilities:

But the psychologist was one of the resources that, once again, I went to my coach to ask him about that I needed some help when I had my major breakdown, because I almost quit college and dropped out or whatever. And I trusted him to find me the right person to help me or get some type of help, whatever that could be. Yeah, that psychologist really changed the trajectory and really kind of made me feel comfortable, where I felt like I was doing that myself by telling my story about my experiences throughout college, and just being in a different environment (542-548).

While adjusting to the college environment and new expectations, Nas indicated that he was overwhelmed. For him, college brought about several stressors: fulfilling athletic expectations, completing academic obligations, living away from home, adjusting to

college, and being part of an underrepresented campus demographic. Therefore, the challenge of enduring these stressors was immense and receiving mental health support to manage these experiences was necessary.

Comparably, the transition out of sport into the world of work presents its own challenges and stressors. For the participants, their transition included the separation from competitive athletic play at the professional level. Therefore, the transition was a compound experience of entering the professional world and relinquishing a major part of one's identity. In Eric's case, his distancing from professional playing pursuits was due to the impact of injuries on his athletic performance. As a result, he recounted how he needed support with processing the transition:

Yeah, [I would have liked some other resources and support]. I think on so many levels, too, mainly on the emotional side, learning how to cope with all that, because it can be a lot for a kid that age. I was still a kid at the time, and I was still a kid just getting my freedom. It's a lot to literally be, like, from an infant to a baby. That's how I was feeling. Just being like, I felt like I was, like you got to figure it out man. And that's it. And that's really how life works, man. You know, it's one of those things where you can't really sit around and mope, because if you do, you ain't going to really get nowhere. So, I wish I would have had resources in that. (888-895).

As football ended for Eric, the reality of leaving sport behind, at least from a competitive playing lens, was challenging to process. His reflection on wanting emotional support with unpacking this transition indicated his developmental maturity surrounding post-college preparation and readiness. Though he felt an obligation to figure out a path on his own, Eric could have benefited from additional psychological support to help him process the end and beginning of the seasons he was traversing. Given these reflections, the transition from sport into the world of work is not only a matter of practical and strategic plans to be successful once the transition emerges. Instead, it also includes

psychological awareness and processing of how the student-athletes feel about leaving sport from professional athletic playing perspective and assuring they are sensibly and emotionally equipped for the next phase of life.

Theme 5: Career Decision-Making Difficulties

Given the participants' reflections about matriculating through college and having limited career exploration opportunities, they often entered the post-college phase not knowing how they wanted to transition. In many respects, their immediate post-college transition was a matter of survival. Since they did not have any work experience, there was not much insight to shape their approach to establishing a career. This gap in their experience positioned them to engage in their work pursuit through a varied process. In some instances, the participants had favorable outcomes as they established their careers. In other instances, the participants have faced enduring challenges for pursuing the career path that fits their goals. Through the difficulties of making career decisions, the participants identified a few elements that complicated this process: readiness for the transition into the world of work, interim value of work, and realizing their passions.

Readiness for the transition into the world of work. As the participants began life after college, they soon realized that they were not prepared or equipped for this new phase. Although their professional athletic prospects might have been solidified before college ended, the transition into the world of work was a rude awakening. The transition produced shock and immediate existential questioning. As an example, Eric described his feeling surrounding the realization that football ended, and the rest of his life had not been considered:

I was not ready at all, you know, like another culture shock, because it was like everything that I had worked for four or five years for like literally like went

down a drain. It was like as if I never played college football. So, it was like a mama dropping her baby off at the police station and just like leaving. And, like when I walked off the football field, I'll never forget that feeling. I felt like, "What am I going to do with my life (525–529)?"

Similarly, Tony echoed the limited awareness of post-college life and how it was an afterthought when he reflected, "I never really thought about after until it got there like, 'What do you want to do (659–660)?" In these cases, Tony and Eric did not consider their post-college plans until the moment arrived. The lack of entertaining post-college plans during their matriculation created the impression that the timing for completing a successful transition was overdue. Consequently, the jolt of sport ending was a jarring experience, especially for Eric. His reaction suggested that he was not mentally and emotionally prepared for sport to end. Furthermore, his symbolism of how it felt to enter this new phase was quite poignant because his life was starting over. The life he created and developed no longer existed and he was not ready to endure the next season of his life. Unfortunately, the focus on athletic competition and academic coursework seemed to limit their attention to how they would endure the transition from sport into the world of work.

In addition to the limited consideration of post-college plans, there were other challenges that the participants endured. While some participants might not have spent much time exploring post-college plans, there were a few participants that might have thought about their next chapter following college but lacked the tangible experience to make definitive decisions. Jamer's reflection on transitioning into the world of work amplified the lack of preparation due to limited real-world experience:

I was not prepared at all. I do remember applying the jobs. But again, you got to understand like it was I didn't have any internship experience. Like, you know,

because while people are doing internships like we're, we have like spring ball and stuff (726-728).

Despite his work experience gap, Jamer tried to establish a career by applying to jobs.

However, his lack of internship experience was unfavorable to his decision about where he would shift his focus. Furthermore, Jamer posed a critical existential query about the transition from sport into post-college life:

And once they leave college, they're just lost. You're just lost. Because once you leave college, you lose your identity. Like you've been an athlete since you were 12 years old. What are you now? Even if you were sitting on the bench as an athlete, like, what are you supposed to do now (626-629)?

As mentioned above, sport was an important part of the participants' identities during college and even prior to college. With the dissolution of sport as a professional pursuit following college, Jamer wondered what would be next. For him, sport was such a long-standing fixture in his life that not having sport as a part of his ongoing experiences would be strange. His identity seemed quite enmeshed with sport, which meant that he might feel faceless upon terminating sport participation. Regardless of how significant the student-athletes' role on the team might be, this transition was branded as difficult for anyone because sport tends to represent much of how student-athletes view themselves.

Although the participants shared the general view that they were not prepared for post-college life, not every participant was bewildered about future steps. Benaiah indicated having general ideas about potential plans, but not having a specific execution strategy. He shared having interest in running a business, but he indicated a posture of exploration when he said, “[I wanted to run a business, but the type of business] was just up in the air. I was just trying to figure it out (144–148).” Like many college students, Benaiah was still exploring how he wanted to use his business degree after college ended.

In a sense, he had a foundational vision for his post-college plans, but he had not been able to give much thought to how he would pursue this process. While Benaiah might not have had a clear blueprint for his career path, the process of transitioning was not necessarily a jolting experience. However, the unclear plans for pursuing post-college life were the general disposition that the participants reflected, which resulted in a trial-and-error approach to career decision making.

Interim value of work. As shared in previous themes, the participants were not able to devote much time to career planning and non-athletic activities outside of obligatory coursework. Therefore, the transition from sport into the world of work was an unfamiliar and untapped endeavor. Due to the novel experience, the participants shared that they had to use the transitional period to gain more awareness of potential career paths. However, the exploration of careers was not the only impetus for the participants' approach to securing work. In some cases, they were using their work opportunities to meet basic needs.

One of primary experiences detailed by the participants included testing the waters at various jobs to determine what fit best or fill an available opportunity. Eric recounted his initial transitional experiences and how his work roles presented sobering realities:

[I have] usually [worked] just like labor jobs, like warehouse, driving forklifts. I have nothing to show for me going to college for five years. Nothing. Yeah, warehouse jobs. I worked at the hospital one time, cleaning floors, and that was humbling too. Because it was like, I was really a janitor at the time. And I was coaching him at my high school, and I was telling the kids, I was like, "I do floors." They like, "Man, you're a janitor!" And it was the first time that it had sunk in, and I really realized that it was one of those things like, "Damn. I am." It's one of those like life humbling things because you think like as a student athlete, you go to school for five years. You played ball for five years. One of the two is going to work out. And for me, neither one did, and it was real humbling

for a high school kid telling me: "You're a janitor." And there's nothing wrong with being a janitor, but it's just like, they ain't what I went to school for. Yeah, so I worked so hard to be a janitor (588-597).

This realization brought perspective to Eric's lived experience. As a student-athlete, he was preparing for a professional athletic playing career, but this opportunity did not materialize. Also, his academic pursuits did not position him for a career within his major. Eric shared that he did not complete his undergraduate degree, which has affected his career possibilities. He also doubted whether his major would lead to viable career options stating:

What am I really going to do with a Sociology degree? That's one of those things where you realize like all the stuff I went to school for and doing this. It's really not a passion [or] make me happy (514-516).

Given his lack of preparation, Eric's transitional process was complicated; however, his limited interest in his academic major exacerbated this challenge because he did not include this potential pathway in his career search. Though he could have considered his major as a career avenue, Eric was clear that he did not have interest in this field. This dilemma reflected a consequence of pursuing a major that was not desirable or did not align with the student-athletes' interest. As a result, the career search was narrowed by these complexities and increased the challenge of establishing a career after college.

Also, the reality of the responsibilities did not offer the participants much room for expansive exploration because meeting their basic needs was paramount. While they might have wanted to consider any career paths, the participants had to recognize the different barriers they were facing with casting a wide net. Specifically, B shared his approach to establishing a career following college and how he arrived at his current work position:

For me because I graduated with Mathematics for Business. So, I'm applying to all the banks everywhere, but you know, you still need money. By that time, I'm in an apartment. I still got bills and different things like that to pay. So, I just I ended up working for a company [that does aircraft grounds and cargo services]. We did frontier flights to just hold me over. That was the first job I can get. I think I was making like maybe \$12 an hour or something like that. Something like \$12 an hour, but I'm still applying to different banks and different things trying to get my foot in the door. And multiple denies though, multiple like over 60 jobs denied me. I ended up going to a temp agency getting an entry level position with [a financial firm]. I ended up staying with [this financial firm] for four years, just working my way up the company. And then pretty much this past April, I just ended up, giving it up and resigning, but I currently work part time at American Airlines (396-404).

Although B had some interest in following his major into a career, the vacant positions were not offered to him. Therefore, he had to start in a role where he could find work. Given his inability to participate in an internship or gain work experience, he likely was not afforded some of the roles because he could not convey his capabilities to fulfill certain roles. While he did not receive many offers, B showed great ambition with his persistent application to numerous positions.

Similarly, Jamer reflected on his experience of starting his career and how he arrived at his current role:

I'll be honest, nothing necessarily led me to be on this specific career path that I'm on. I'm still searching for exactly, you know, what I want to do, what I want to be a part of. I mean, I got into bodybuilding and stuff like that. So that's been a passion of mine. And, you know, I was able to create, like, a big following off that, and, you know, be able to motivate and inspire people like that. But, as far as like, a career, it's been really tough, man. It's been really tough. Like, because I still feel like I'm just in survival mode (819-824).

Despite completing his college degree, his current career path was not motivated by any experience. Jamer clarified that his career path is being constructed and his goal is still being determined. Furthermore, Jamer recounted his experience of trying distinct roles and learning what he might be interested in pursuing:

So, I went from, you know, being a customer service agent. You know, just making some income to be able to take care of myself, right, to getting involved with like an ex-girlfriend, who, at the time, I was living in Boston. So anyways, I moved to DC with her, because honestly, I didn't necessarily like Boston either. So, I moved to DC with her, and got like a sales job here. And, um, you know, I was like a top sales rep here. So that's when I realized, like, I was really good at sales, you know, and I'm really good with people and, you know, providing value and, you know, just having an understanding. So that's just having these different positions from customer service in dealing with like, you know, a really tough like, customer service environment to, you know, a really like fast paced sales environment (825-833).

In general, Jamer named that his current job pursuit is predicated on survival and assuring that he can maintain his basic needs. His work experience revealed that he is talented in sales, and he also has passion for bodybuilding. Even though he gained this insight, Jamer's career vision is still being constructed. He was gathering more information to help him decide the path that would be most suitable. As a result, the ultimate focus was meeting his basic needs as opposed to an intentional pursuit of career paths that interest him.

While fulfilling basic needs might be an important part of initial transition into the world of work, there were participants who might have had a vision for their career paths. However, the journey to fulfill their aspirations was not straightforward. For example, Tony expressed upon leaving college, he had ideas about his desired career path: "So, I knew I wanted to coach or teach, but I knew I had to take steps to get to that (660-661)." Even though he might not have had work experience, there were general ideas of how he wanted to direct his energy after college. During his initial post-college experience, Tony identified several jobs he fulfilled until he reached the opportunity that aligned with his vision:

So, when I got out of college, the first thing I graduated 2016 and went into my masters (662)... [Then, after several jobs,] my principal called me at my old high

school. It was a teacher I had before that called. I got an opportunity to do security and coach ball. I instantly the left, got into the schools. Like okay, "What do I need to be a teacher? I need a teacher's certificate. Dang." So, I didn't have that. I had a degree. Yeah, but you still need to have a teacher's certificate to teach these kids. You could only do so much. I can sub, but I want better. I want to be a dean. I want to be a counselor (674–680).

Although Tony received the opportunity he wanted, there were limitations in how he could fulfill his position. Tony was able to work within a school, but he could not do much beyond working as a coach, a security guard, or a substitute because he did not have the proper credentials. In addition to not having the credentials, it seemed as if Tony was not aware of the necessary credentials to position him to teach. There were several aspirations he held with respect to working within a school, but he did not have the direction or knowledge to pursue the path that would allow him to fulfill these goals.

Given the requirements for fulfilling certain career aspirations, there are instances in which the participants had to accept opportunities which were unpleasant. While enduring the unpleasant parts of the jobs, the participants identified that the opportunities were tolerable for several reasons. As Tony shared above, his desire was to work with youth in the capacity of teacher or coach. However, his training experience did not allow him to satisfy this role. Instead, he has worked in positions as a means of survival, which has not produced much joy and contentment:

Well, I can say about the job I've been having, I've never been happy. You know, the money be cool, but money don't make you happy, if you don't love the job you do. You know, it's only just a large amount of money, but you still sad, or you still mad because you're doing this job. So, I wasn't happy at all with those jobs. You know what I'm saying, I had to do what I had to do to keep and maintain bills and maintain things, but I wasn't happy. Like even with [the parcel company], I liked my job, you know. [It gave me the chance] to do what I need to do, get bills. I can travel, do what I need to do. I like I can make good money. But, in a sense of "do I love it?" No. "Can I be here for fifty years?" No way. "Can I be more than three years?" No. If I'm going to do that, I'm going to do something I love. I love working with kids. I love helping. I love coaching. I love sports. So that's

something I could do for 80 years, 100 years, you know what I'm saying, however long it takes me. Any of those jobs I worked at wasn't jobs I loved, but just jobs because I made money. I didn't too much care for them. Yeah, I was the best. I try to be the best I want to be at every job I was at, but I still didn't too much care for them (888-899).

As conveyed in Tony's reflection, his current and previous jobs have served the purpose of fulfilling basic needs. Furthermore, these jobs have not been positions that he has enjoyed. Unfortunately, he has experienced a lack of satisfaction with his post-college career pursuit due to the necessity of prioritizing his basic needs over his passions. Even though the job opportunities might have provided benefits, such as a good income or flexibility in leisure time, these benefits did not provide sufficient gratification.

In a different light, certain job opportunities served a larger purpose. Given the road to certain career paths, the participants acknowledged that their initial work transitions helped them move closer to their desired destination. In particular, Benaiah highlighted how his current work endeavors fulfill a greater vision:

I think [my current job is] a means to an end, right? Simply, because it's provided me the tools that I need to get to that next level. So, just going back from what I mentioned earlier, it's just understanding that, "Listen, you're in a storm. You don't have to like all aspects of your job." But, find exactly what you need to get out of it and get just that. So, you know, my current role, I like it. I enjoy it. Essentially, because the things I need to get out of it and the skills that I need to build upon, I'm able to get that out of it (712-717).

Although he might enjoy every aspect of his current role, Benaiah indicated that he envisions a greater purpose. Like the other participants, the job lets him support himself. However, this job is not the end of his story. Instead, he has viewed this role as a way to acquire more skills and experience that will serve him in the future. Given these reflections, the participants highlighted that their transition into the world of work might

involve a foundational period in which they are attending to fundamental human needs or taking incremental steps towards their professional aspirations.

Realizing their passions. Through the process of working temporary jobs, the participants shared that they clarified their interests. Through trial and error, they have discovered where their passions lie and begun pursuing them. For example, Nas discussed how his career path has unveiled his passion for being connected to educational spaces:

Well, I was a graduate assistant [at a major university]. I was a mobile therapist a couple months prior, like that come months ago. All my jobs been basically working in [primary and secondary] schools pretty much anywhere and with therapeutic support staff because that's in alignment of what I wanted to do ultimately. Right now, I'm right back in school as a Climate Associate. So, all my jobs have been pretty much in that realm simply because it's very intentional of the scheduling for schools. Like I said, no days are the same and I think my relatability helps me navigate those spaces because I can speak to both spaces, not being an athlete and being a professional, as well. And going to further my education. So, that's pretty much what has been my dream as far as just taking jobs and stuff. It's literally being in schools and as a mobile therapist (724-733).

In particular, Nas started in a familiar space as a graduate assistant at a university within sport, which allowed him to connect with a familiar environment. Through his continued work, he was positioned to work with youth in a therapeutic or behavioral well-being sense. As a result, he has discovered that work within this capacity fits his desires and ambitions. Similarly, Benaiah expressed that his current endeavors within business have fueled his movement towards the future:

Actually, I began to work on my next steps. Ultimately, I like real estate. I want to dive a little deeper into that aspect and the entrepreneurial feel. So, I recently just received my license and I'm doing [what I can] in regard to setting myself up to make that leap of faith (728-732).

As shared above, Benaiah had not fulfilled a role that fit his exact desires, but he had been able to identify how he could leverage this experience for future plans. Through this

process, Benaiah has recognized the industry that interests him and fulfills his career desires. As a result, he has made progress towards pursuing the career role he wants and positioning himself to actualize his vision.

While some participants highlighted that their career decisions have aligned with their dreams, other participants discovered their long-term goals through recent activities. Specifically, John asserted there was an extensive period of searching before he realized what drove his career passions:

It took a while, years, to just find actually, "What else am I passionate about?" And, I don't even want to say years. It just took a little while, you know, but then then I started my nonprofit and started to do like camps and little things like that. But it wasn't even then, it was once I shifted and started giving scholarships away to high school seniors who were going to, you know, a four-year college, or trade school, or community college, whatever it was. And reading their stories, you know, through their essays and things like that when they're applying. And just seeing how they got to where they are and what their drive is. And I wasn't at the time, like awarding athletes anything. It was just students. And that gave me a feeling of scoring a touchdown. And I was like, "Okay, that's, I love doing that." I love being a part of that. I love being able to read those stories and hear about what makes them tick and it's not sports (503-512).

In John's case, he was contemplating his passions and seeking to understand what would motivate his career pursuits. As a result, he spent some time after college exploring different paths that might spark consistent interest and sustain his attention. Through different professional opportunities, he recognized his desire to help youth in terms of achieving their goals. Moreover, he recognized that sport did not have to be a part of his work for him to achieve career fulfillment. Similarly, Jamer highlighted how his current career endeavors helped him find value in his identity beyond sport:

For once in my life, I realized, like, you know, I do have a role opposed to just being an athlete, you know what I mean? Like, there's things that I can do. For once, just recently, actually, like, right before this New Year, I became like, just more confident in myself as not being an athlete in society. But, also realizing like, I still need something that gives me that drive and that push and still need to

feel like, you know, I'm important to some certain extent, you know. Just to be as transparent as possible. And that's why I think I got into bodybuilding. And, you know, became like, you know, just became really good at it (836-842).

As a result of his persistence through different jobs, Jamer learned what mattered to him in terms of the post-college transition. While finding a job that allowed him to take care of himself was important, he also wanted to have purpose and value. During college, football gave him purpose, but it was the only area in which he felt like he had value. Therefore, his journey after college involved reconstructing this sense of purpose and his work through bodybuilding provided this fulfillment.

Given these reflections, the participants illustrated the usefulness of testing various avenues for career opportunities. While they might not have had much experience or knowledge about careers that would be suitable, their approach to fulfilling available job opportunities helped them uncover where they would like to direct their futures. In some instances, the path was clear, and their course of action was methodical as it directed them towards their goal. In other cases, the path was not systematic, but it led the participants to reveal unknown interests. Therefore, the transition into the world of work offered the participants an opportunity to activate untapped potential for their career future.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This study explored the experiences of former Division 1 Black, male, first-generation college basketball and football student-athletes who transitioned from competitive collegiate athletic play into the world of work. As shown through the literature, Black men represent a vast majority of Division 1 men's basketball and football student-athletes (Irick, 2019), but a small minority of all student-athletes achieve an athletic playing career (NCAA, 2019a). Furthermore, most Division 1 basketball and football student-athletes expect their careers to involve sport (Paskus & Bell, 2016) and a substantial number of the family members of first-generation college student-athletes hold similar expectations (NCAA, 2016). However, there are few sport-related career positions (Gallup Inc., 2016) and Black professionals hold a minuscule number of those positions (Department for Professional Employees, 2019). With that said, this research was important due to the disproportionate comparison of student-athletes' aspirations for long-term sport involvement post college and the available sport-related career opportunities.

This chapter included a discussion of the significant findings capturing the transitional experiences of former Division 1 Black, male, first-generation college basketball and football student-athletes into the world of work. Specifically, the research was informed by literature regarding identity, the first-generation college experience, belongingness, and the college-to-work transition process. As a result, the following theories underpinned the research questions: transition theory, social identity theory, and the theory of work adjustment. Given the literature informing the research and the theoretical underpinning, there was a presumption that former Division 1 Black, male,

first-generation college basketball and football student-athletes would pursue work opportunities and environments in which their salient identity would thrive. Nonetheless, the primary objective for this research was to address the following inquiries:

(1) What factors affect how former Division 1 Black, male, first-generation college basketball and football student-athletes navigate their transition from sport into sport-related careers not involving competitive athletic play?

(2) What factors affect how former Division 1 Black, male, first-generation college basketball and football student-athletes navigate their transition from sport into non-sport-related careers?

Through this study, the participants offered firsthand accounts regarding how their collegiate experiences and immediate post-collegiate experiences affected their transition into the world of work. The way in which former Division 1 Black male first-generation college basketball and football student-athletes navigated their transition from sport into the world of work in this study was complex and captured by five themes: (1) athletic identity reinforcement, (2) lack of self-directed choices, (3) connection through identifiable spaces, (4) village-based support, and (5) career decision-making difficulties. Furthermore, there were subthemes for each emergent theme containing more intricate considerations of navigating the transition away from competitive athletic play into the world of work (see Appendix I). These themes illustrated how the individual was influenced with respect to their salient identity in terms of navigating the transition. In addition, factors of belongingness, external support, autonomy, and fundamental needs framed how the individual endured the transition. The individual integrated several factors to facilitate their transitional process.

Interpretation of the Findings

Navigating the transition from competitive athletic play into the world of work was unique and nuanced for this collection of participants. An important note regarding the participants in this study compared to the general college student population is the difference between time devoted to extracurricular activities unrelated to class activities. Previous research has shown that male basketball student-athletes average 34 weekly hours and football student-athletes average 40 weekly hours or more in athletic participation (Paskus & Bell, 2016). For men ranging ages 15 to 24, they average 5 to 7 hours daily on leisure, sports, and other activities, which translates to 35 to 42 weekly hours (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022). While the statistics are not specific to college students, the age range considers the college-age population. With this information in mind, it is imperative to acknowledge that the general college population can construct their non-class-related activities with more flexibility than student-athletes. As a result, the findings illustrated a nuanced experience because the participants from this study had a significant amount of their non-class-related activity time pre-determined unlike their peers and the general college population. The experiences of the participants illustrated journeys into work that involved pursuits of professional athletic play, transition into sport-related roles not involving athletic play, immediate transition into non-sport-related endeavors, and continued searches for individual purpose. Despite the variant paths that each participant followed, there were five themes that encapsulated how their transition was shaped. In particular, the participants endured transitions in which their athletic identity was historically predominant, autonomy was limited, relatability was preferred, holistic support and development were vital, and decisions

were cumbersome. Consequently, these themes characterized both positive and negative aspects of the transitional process that influenced the participants' career pursuits. The following sections provide further context for each theme and how it influenced the transition from collegiate athletic play into the world of work.

Theme 1: Athletic Identity Reinforcement

This research concluded that athletic identity reinforcement influenced how former Division 1 Black, male, first-generation college basketball and football student-athletes in this study navigate the transition from sport into the world of work, which reflects the literature suggesting the consequence of over-emphasizing athletic identity among Division 1 student athletes (Brewer, van Raalte, & Linder, 1993). The findings indicated that the participants were often reminded of their student-athlete status with respect to their collegiate endeavors. Literature showed that student-athletes struggle with balancing time commitments (Bimper, 2010; Chen, Snyder, & Wagner, 2014) and the findings reflected the notion that daily structure revolves around sport. This arrangement further emphasized athletics while devaluing other aspects of the college experience. In addition, the findings outlined that the participants held similar schedules in which their non-athletic endeavors were overwhelmed by athletic obligations. Furthermore, the notion that they are better characterized as athlete-students was quoted within the participant accounts. Despite attending their institutions to participate in the academic and athletic environments, the participants felt forced to prioritize sport and view non-athletic endeavors as subordinate aspects of their college experiences. Consequently, this structure affected how the participants view themselves in relation to the campus and their sense of self.

Given the systemic prioritization of their athletic identity, the participants were affirmed within athletic spaces. Their integration with campus was contingent upon their resonance with their sport. As student-athletes in Division 1 revenue-generating sports, they garnered much attention, which reinforced the benefit of sport participation due to popularity and publicity as seen in high-school student-athletes (Lyons, Dorsch, Bell, & Morgan, 2018). Since Division 1 sports are more prominent within mainstream culture, the participants' engagement in collegiate sports allowed them to continue experiencing the adulation they might have received prior to their college experience. However, the sensationalism behind their sport participation generated consequences with identity and connection to campus because their value was actualized only within athletic spaces. As Hawley, Hosch, and Bovaird (2014) discovered, student-athletes endure a sense of separation from the general student population. For the participants, this subculture and consistent reinforcement of athletic identity forged the notion that sport is the primary endeavor that provided a sense of mattering. The combination of structuring their day around sport and experiencing the publicity from sport suggested that their athletic identity should be most salient. Therefore, embracing other identities was not considered because there are no valuable outcomes advanced for personal development outside of athletics.

With lacking affirmation away from sport, the participants were predisposed to a narrow view of their identity. Previous research asserted that student-athletes are more likely to experience identity foreclosure (Good, Brewer, Petitpas, van Raalte, & Mahar, 1993). Also, student-athletes are often validated by their athletic identity (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011) and their extended engagement in competitive sports often facilitates

identity foreclosure (Brewer, van Raalte, & Petitpas, 2000). The findings reflected that athletic identity shaped the participants' individual value. The consistent reinforcement of athletic identity did not incentivize seeking additional avenues of interest or curiosity to cultivate a more holistic sense of self. Instead, sports were centralized for the participants, which disarmed the ability to pursue college exploration experiences like the general student population. Due to athletic endeavors structuring the participants' schedules, the primary message was that sport defined them. Therefore, any outside influence had a limited chance to affect a broader outlook for who the participants were and what they could become. As a result, their worldview was limited to sport.

Given that participants were affirmed by their athletic identity, there was a premature belief that sport was the only place where they belonged. Previous research concluded that a strong athletic identity predicted a lower sense of campus belonging (Gayles, Crandall, & Morin, 2018). The findings amplified this established claim, which illustrates a crippling consequence for the participants in this study. Without feeling connected to the campus, these former student-athletes were not primed to envision themselves outside of the athletic realm. Furthermore, the findings illustrated that the lack of integration within the campus environment limited engagement with their academic endeavors. This outcome reflected previous research about football student-athletes in which limited academic participation due to athletic involvement promoted more desirability for football-related future aspirations (Porter, 2019). With this information, the participants in this study might have only envisioned sport-related futures because their time was consumed with sport activities. Although the participants might have additional interests, their college experience allowed them to only develop curiosity and

competence within sport. As a result, the structure of athletic identity reinforcement hindered how they could pursue their post-college experiences and endure a potential transition away from sport. This structure might have suggested to the participants that sport was the most viable post-college path to follow regardless of whether the career pursuit involves competitive athletic play.

Theme 2: Lack of Self-Directed Choices

As indicated in the findings, athletic identity reinforcement infringed upon the participants' self-concept. An additional consequence was that choices were stifled. Previous research indicated that student-athletes start college with predetermined academic and career paths (McQuown-Linnemeyer & Brown, 2010). While the findings did not suggest that the participants entered with established plans, there was intentional consideration of how academics would affect athletics. Specifically, the findings conveyed an inclination toward courses and majors that would not interfere with scheduling and would not create too much additional stress with balancing school and sport. In some cases, there were deliberate thoughts from the student-athletes. In other instances, there were nudges and suggestions from academic and athletic personnel that weakened the independent choice for the participants. Also, the findings reflected that the participants, at times, were placed in classroom settings and majors in which fellow student-athletes were enrolled. This outcome resonated with established literature regarding academic clustering among male basketball and football student-athletes, which involved the enrollment in less demanding courses so that academic requirements were fulfilled with ease (Knight Commission, 2006; Otto, 2015). Although the participants had desires to maintain eligibility, the impetus for their academic endeavors

was to ensure that they could compete. Through intentional clustering or selection of accommodating majors, the participants in this study were distanced from making decisions about their college experience. Each decision seemed to hinge upon an external factor imposed upon them. Therefore, the participants were positioned to operate according to what someone else identified as best for them.

In addition to the systemic nature of scheduling academics around sport, the findings showed that coaches facilitated decreased autonomy for the participants in terms of academics and career planning. The results communicated that the participants in this study were expected to select majors that had classes fitting within a certain window of time during the day. Furthermore, any non-sport-related activities were not permissible if they interfered with athletic activities. This conclusion countered previous research in which coaches indicated that adjusting expectations for selecting majors might encourage more academic and career exploration (Bjornsen & Dinkel, 2017). However, the findings affirmed established literature showing that student-athletes are often urged to select academic majors that would not disrupt athletic endeavors, which emphasized athletic objectives over career considerations (Foster & Huml, 2017). Due to this approach, former Division 1 Black, male, first-generation college basketball and football student-athletes in this study were dissuaded from being immersed in their academic livelihood. Consequently, this approach had deleterious effects on career decision-making given that they were not positioned to exercise much agency. Previous research established that a more salient athletic identity yielded lower engagement in academic experiences (Huang, Hung, & Chou, 2016). Furthermore, student-athletes in previous studies have expressed feeling inactive within career exploration and decision-making (Navarro & McCormick,

2017). By centralizing athletic activities, former Division 1 Black, male, first-generation college basketball and football student-athletes in this study might have more challenges with constructing a future for themselves because they were distanced from essential decisions within their college experience. As a result, their perceived lack of choices primed them to feel as though there were limited paths in which they could direct their lives.

Theme 3: Connection through Identifiable Spaces

Despite the limited sense of choice, the domain of relatability was important to how former Division 1 Black, male, first-generation college basketball and football student-athletes in this study considered their transitional experience. As mentioned, the findings showed that the student-athletes are affirmed by their athletic identity, which predisposed them to feel connected to their institutions within the sport realm. However, the daily schedules and choices for non-athletic activities smothered how they could build additional connections. Consequently, this structure reinforced the belief that they connected within athletic spaces and did not connect in non-athletic spaces. Previous research conveyed that belongingness influences desires for higher educational pursuits (Strayhorn, 2019) and a greater sense of belonging stimulates academic self-confidence, academic motivation, academic adjustment, and overall achievement (Freeman, Anderman, & Jensen, 2007; Murphy & Zirkel, 2015; Ostrove & Long, 2007; Pittman & Richmond, 2007; Walton & Cohen, 2011). Given that the findings illustrated belongingness being affirmed through athletics, there was a probability that former Division 1 Black, male, first-generation college basketball and football student-athletes in this study did not feel connected to non-athletic spaces. In addition, they could not forge

this relationship, even if they desired to cultivate relatability within non-sport-related environments. Furthermore, previous research concluded that belongingness is positively correlated to intragroup similarity (Easterbrook & Vignoles, 2013) and belongingness increases when students participate in extra-curricular endeavors, such as clubs and organizations, sports, and recreational activities (Strayhorn, 2019). For the participants in this study, the findings illustrated that belongingness was limited to sport during college. This result primed them to foresee connection within athletic spaces once they left college. Therefore, the consideration of opportunities away from sport might have held lower priority for the participants. Instead of considering various avenues for post-college plans, former Division 1 Black, male, first-generation college basketball and football student-athletes in this study might have had a constricted scope of possibilities for their future.

While the experiences of former Division 1 Black, male, first-generation college basketball and football student-athletes in this study were comparable in terms of relatability within sport, there were nuances in terms of campus belongingness and how that shaped post-college considerations. The findings revealed that attending an HBCU yielded an increased sense of campus belonging compared to attending a PWI. This discovery resonated with previous research proposing that Black college students endure more isolation and ostracism due to the institutional culture not representing or reflecting Black experiences (Rawls & David, 2006). Research showed that black student-athletes experience less belongingness to their college or university campus, especially compared to their white counterparts (Gayles, Crandall, & Morin, 2018). However, this nuanced comparison between HBCU experiences and PWI experiences suggested that there might

have been more integration outside of sport for a few of the participants in this study. While PWI institutions might not always create welcoming environments, HBCU institutions might offer more opportunities to integrate into non-athletic spaces. The findings did not necessarily indicate that there was more ease with transitioning from sport into the world of work. However, the sense of connection to the campus environment suggested that there was more space to affirm both athletic identity and racial/cultural identity. Previous research described that Black student-athletes endured a more complex experience because their Black identity and athletic identity held equal significance in their experience (Bimper, Harrison, & Clark, 2012). The comparison of the PWI experience and HBCU experience for former Division 1 Black, male, first-generation college basketball and football student-athletes in this study insinuated that attending an HBCU might have presented greater opportunities for campus integration outside of athletics. Through this approach, the participants might have been able to cultivate more depth to their identity away from sport. As a result, former Division 1 Black, male, first-generation college basketball and football student-athletes in this study might have felt they could relate to additional environments besides sport, which might have eased their transition into the world of work.

Theme 4: Village-Based Support

Although connection was a key factor to envisioning a more holistic future, former Division 1 Black, male, first-generation college basketball and football student-athletes in this study needed support to foster successful transitional experiences. As previous literature indicates, first-generation college students were unaware of the efforts required for a successful college experience (Brooks-Terry, 1988). Furthermore, previous

research concluded that the lack of exposure to the college environment predisposed first-generation Black male students to troubles with career development and exploration (Hertel, 2002). Given that the first-generation college student identity was part of the participants' identity, their college experiences and transition into the world of work were novel endeavors. Therefore, the transitional process included some hardship because they lacked any exposure or insight. The findings conveyed that Division 1 Black, male, first-generation college basketball and football student-athletes had limited individuals within their immediate circles to provide direction regarding their collegiate journey. The most insightful resources were mentors. Also, the findings identified that encouragement from family despite their limited knowledge of providing instruction was helpful for the student-athletes' commitment to completing college. Regardless of whether the source of support was knowledgeable of the college experience and transitioning out of college, encouragement towards academic and career endeavors was still impactful for former Division 1 Black, male, first-generation college basketball and football student-athletes in this study.

In addition, the findings illustrated that consistent support from coaches and academic advisors would be desired for support with enduring college and navigating the transition into the world of work. This structure of support and reinforcement aligned with previous research noting that consistent interactions with athletic personnel created trust for student-athletes to seek them for support with career considerations (Carter-Francique, Hart, & Steward, 2013; Navarro & McCormick, 2017) and that coaches were considered primary sources of support for student-athletes (Adams, Coffee, & Lavalley, 2015). The way in which Division 1 athletic environments were often structured, student-

athletes had support personnel within those departments specializing in needs such as academic advisement and career support. If this structure was implemented, concerted efforts would be needed to prioritize career exploration for the student-athletes. As shared before, former Division 1 Black, male, first-generation college basketball and football student-athletes in this study faced the challenge not being aware of how to best navigate college because they are experiencing college through trial and error. Therefore, concerted efforts were necessary for facilitating more insight so that the participants could make informed decisions about their transition from college into the world of work. However, leaving the work of fulfilling academic and career development to the trained professionals was a shortsighted pursuit. Coaches and team-specific staff members were trusted points of contact for the participants in this study. Therefore, having auxiliary activities, such as academic and career development, championed by coaches and team-specific staff members might yield more successful transitions because the student-athletes might be prompted toward using these developmental resources.

While the support from external forces was vital, the findings exhibited the importance of individual preparation for the lived career adjustment process and psychological impact of transitioning. A common finding of this study was the desire for internships and career exposure, which resonated with established literature in which coaches asserted that career transition preparation could be helped by employable skills training, life skills discussions, and enactment of a career developmental phase system (Bjornsen & Dinkel, 2017). Additionally, this finding reflected the outcomes of previous research suggesting that preemptive planning for transitioning from sport enabled a smoother process (Brown et al., 2018; Cummins & O'Boyle, 2015). Given the various

fashions upon which transitioning from sport could occur, former Division 1 Black, male, first-generation college basketball and football student-athletes in this study had to consider how well they were prepared for this possibility. The limited opportunity for the participants to develop their career acumen and interest indicated a significant gap, which complicated their departure from sport. Furthermore, the participants were positioned to endure another process in which they were unfamiliar when they lacked the chance to learn which career paths might be suitable for their aspirations and interests.

Simultaneously, the participants were navigating the emotions of discontinuing a deep-rooted passion that has brought familiarity, comfort, and stability. The findings of this study regarding the psychological challenge of navigating transition into the world of work emphasized previous research noting student-athletes often felt inadequate, self-blame, and endure anxiety when going through the transitional process (Russell, Cottingham, Barry, Lee, & Walsh, 2018). Therefore, ensuring that mental health support was imperative because Division 1 Black, male, first-generation college basketball and football student-athletes are not only undergoing a novel experience; they might also be grieving the loss or reimagination of how sport fits into their lives. Former Division 1 Black, male, first-generation college basketball and football student-athletes in this study needed more consideration in terms of easing their developmental journeys through college so that they might experience a less arduous transition into the world of work.

Theme 5: Career Decision-Making Difficulties

The most consequential aspect of how the experiences of former Division 1 Black, male, first-generation college basketball and football student-athletes in this study shaped their trajectory was within the area of career decision-making. Through their

college experiences, the participants were lauded and reinforced within their athletic identity. However, the likelihood of athletics being part of their future was marginal when considering both professional athletic playing prospects and opportunities from a non-athletic playing standpoint. As indicated, less than 2% of all basketball and football student-athletes will achieve a major professional athletic playing career (NCAA 2019a) and sport-related jobs constitute less than 4% of total labor force with Black professionals holding 7.5% of the possible positions (Department for Professional Employees, 2019). As a result, the participants needed to consider futures in which sport might not be included for their careers. However, the structure of Division 1 athletics did not lend itself to creating space for the participants to give the utmost consideration to this reality.

The findings conveyed that the participants were often ill-prepared for navigating the transition into the world of work. In some ways, there was an immediate stoppage to sport participation then the consideration of post-college life began, instead of concurrent consideration of the future. This experience supported previous research showing that Black student-athletes reported low career maturity (Houle & Kluck, 2015) and identity foreclosure predicted low career decision-making self-efficacy and athletic identity showed a negative relationship with career decision-making self-efficacy (Brown, Glastetter-Fender, & Shelton, 2000). Furthermore, the lack of preparation for navigating the world of work did not coincide with high career adaptability profiles, which suggested greater career planning, career exploration, and self-efficacy towards occupations (Hirschi & Valero, 2015). The findings also named the overemphasis of athletic identity as a common experience, which suggested that the participants were primed to envision sport within their futures. Though the chances of achieving this reality

were slim, the structure of their experience inhibited them from entertaining other avenues. Given the aspirations noted in the findings, there was symmetry with previous research that concluded that overemphasis in athletic identity reduced career optimism for non-sport-related paths (Tyrance, Harris, & Post, 2013) and increased desires for sport-related careers despite limited opportunities (Cabrita, Rosado, Leite, Serpa, & Sousa, 2014).

Furthermore, the findings conveyed the participants lacked direction and felt they were starting anew when the transition emerged, which brought about discomfort and bewilderment. These outcomes reflected established research showing the transition into the world of work disrupted stability and can lower self-esteem (Reitz, Shrout, Denissen, Dufner, & Bolger, 2019), lack of readiness, confidence, and support for career transitioning generates increased psychological distress (Yang & Gysbers, 2007). Since sport consumed their college experiences, former Division 1 Black, male, first-generation college basketball and football student-athletes in this study might believe they were only equipped for sport-involved futures. The immediate release of athletics from their identity and daily life could be jarring because they had no insight into other aspects of themselves that might offer fulfilling life endeavors. They were narrowed to select options because their development had stunted and thwarted any exploration outside of sport.

Given this limitation in development, former Division 1 Black, male, first-generation college basketball and football student-athletes in this study were susceptible to the experiences that any college student endured with respect to career realities. There was no guarantee that their post-college futures would lead to the anticipated career roles

and endeavors that their college academic and athletic activities projected. The findings showed that the student-athletes considered sport-related career paths, and sometimes, career paths related to their academic majors. However, they often had to accept roles and positions that did not coordinate with their presumed visions. In many cases, the findings showed that work positions were accepted because they sufficed with meeting basic needs. This outcome highlighted previous research that concluded fulfilled work roles did not always align with a person's career desires or career trajectory (Verbruggen & de Vos, 2020). Furthermore, the findings illustrated that the lack of exposure and planning affected career decisions and awareness of jobs they could fulfill, let alone enjoy. Consequently, the participants might have felt uninformed about the paths they could take because they have no exposure to anything other than sport.

Due to sport saturating their collegiate development, former Division 1 Black, male, first-generation college basketball and football student-athletes in this study were apt to pursue sport-related career roles after college because there was familiarity within these opportunities. The findings conveyed that many student-athletes might resort to sport-related roles because they knew what to expect. The learning curve and adjustment would not be as steep as transitioning into a role in which they were unfamiliar. This inclination mirrored previous research citing that student-athletes showed high career optimism and career decision-making self-efficacy when sport-related careers were involved (Cabrita, Rosado, Leite, Serpa, & Sousa, 2014) and career inaction was plausible for individuals enduring transitions bringing notable change or feeling enmeshed with their current context (Verbruggen & de Vos, 2020). Also, the findings corroborated with previous research denoting that Division 1 football student-athletes

showed less adaptive career transitioning due to lacking career development exposure (Navarro & McCormick, 2017). While sport-related career pursuits were normal, the impetus for the participants to consider this option might have been due to perceived ease and relatability rather than aspiration and enthusiasm. They might not have achieved their optimal career path because sport was a premature fit and their career interests were not vetted.

Furthermore, the findings showed that former Division 1 Black, male, first-generation college basketball and football student-athletes in this study felt stuck because they were unaware of their capabilities and had no examples from immediate relatives to follow in terms of career possibilities. The student-athlete experience prevented their exposure to different jobs so that they could decide whether a certain career path was suitable for them. Also, their first-generation college student identity complicated the participants' career pursuits because they were pioneering a new path and were unable to rely upon relatives for career wisdom. These reflections substantiated established literature indicating that first-generation college students needed adequate career support because they were trailblazers in navigating the college experience (Tate et al., 2015). In addition, the findings supported previous research amplifying the importance of work and career exposure so that a person could become aware of job expectations and could assess whether they feel competent to meet job requirements (Bayl-Smith & Griffin, 2015). Offering opportunities for the participants to receive practical work experience might have helped broaden their career considerations. Although there would still be great interest in sport-related careers, they would not have to feel as if jobs within the sport industry were the only positions suitable and available to them.

Implications for Theory and Research

This research was underpinned by the following theories: transition theory, social identity theory, and the theory of work adjustment. Based on the theoretical synthesis (see Appendix A), the theoretical proposition was that the participants would pursue work environments in which their identities as athletes would flourish. However, this proposition did not resonate across all participants. As a result, rival theory emerged to better represent the findings (Yin, 2018). A more appropriate theoretical explanation was that the participants initially pursued work roles amplifying athletic identity due to identity salience, but they settled in the most accessible work positions to satisfy basic needs. Consequently, additional theories and concepts emerged as relevant considerations for how the participants navigated their transition from sport into the world of work. These theories and concepts included nigrescence theory and the intersection of needs via the following theories: psychology of working theory, career preparedness, career maturity, self-determination theory, and Maslow's hierarchy of needs. The subsequent sections conveyed how the findings of this study correspond with these theories.

Transition Theory

Schlossberg's (1995) transition theory examines how adults navigate a life transition beyond the antecedent in which four factors comprise the transition: *situation*, *self*, *strategies*, and *support*. This study was framed through the factor of *self* whereby the person's identity and background will shape how they endure the transition. Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman (1995) indicated that transitions are relative experiences in which each person applies a contextual lens to determine how they will persist through the transition. Within this study, there were overlapping and differing qualities captured. In

general, the population of interest held similar identities as Black men, Division 1 basketball and football student-athletes, and first-generation college students. However, there were nuances with respect to mentorship and family influence for college matriculation and career decision making.

The findings showed that the participants were positioned to have significant challenges with navigating the transition into the world of work due to athletic demands, lack of academic and career matriculation awareness, and limited connection to non-athletic spaces. Even though they might have had desires to equip themselves for navigating the transition, the structure of their collegiate experiences impeded them from this pursuit. Since their collegiate experiences were overrun by athletic participation, they could not acquire the necessary information to facilitate an easier transitional process. Also, they often occupied spaces in which they felt ostracized, which disrupted opportunities for them to seek resources that might decrease both expected and unexpected stressors from the transitional process. Furthermore, they lacked vicarious insight because their family histories do not include narratives and contexts involving college matriculation. Given these factors, the participants in this study seemed to be ill-prepared and unable to attain sufficient resources for their transitional experiences.

Social Identity Theory

Social identity theory posits that a person's self-concept is based on their awareness of identifying with a social group and acknowledgment of significance and relationship with the group (Tajfel, 1972, 1978, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Within this study, there were several factors to consider with respect to identity given that the emphasized identities involved race, athletic involvement, and first-generation college

status. However, these identities were prioritized in diverse ways among the participants. The most important conclusion was that athletic identity shaped how former Division 1 Black, male, first-generation college basketball and football student-athletes in this study were viewed by themselves and others. Regardless of whether athletic identity was deemed most important by the student-athlete or imposed by external parameters, sport was most salient for the participants.

The findings of this study conveyed that athletic identity was reinforced for the participants through belongingness, daily structure, and matriculation decisions. Therefore, the participants in this study struggled to see themselves outside of the athletic lens. Despite potentially holding other interests, the emphasis of athletic identity disempowered the former Division 1 Black, male, first-generation college basketball and football student-athletes in this study from connecting with additional identities. Although they held various identities, the participants established an individual self-definition given their membership within multiple groups (Tajfel, 1978b), but their experiences led to individuating athletic identity as the group membership identity possessing the most value (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Since they often foreclosed other identities due to their college experiences, the career trajectory often directed them towards athletic paths despite the limited opportunities. Their self-image was protracted to sport, which suggested a transition into a non-sport-related career seems impractical.

Theory of Work Adjustment

The theory of work adjustment indicates that successful employment hinges on the interplay between the person and the environment (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984; Lofquist & Dawis, 1969). Furthermore, the theory of work adjustment is underscored by person-

environment correspondence theory, which emphasizes the “mutual responsiveness” factor (Dawis, 1980). This factor highlights a bidirectional relationship between the person and the environment whereby the needs of both the person and the environment are validated and fulfilled (Leonard & Schimmel, 2016). Within this study, the participants transitioned into work environments that were both desirable and undesirable. In many instances, the desirable work environments were due to their perceived relatability and established acumen for the role, which often included sport-related positions. However, the undesirable work environments were due to working in positions that had to be assumed so that basic needs were fulfilled.

The findings of this study exhibited that the former Division 1 Black, male, first-generation college basketball and football student-athletes in this study often accepted available jobs if they could not achieve sport-related jobs. Although they might have earned a degree, their academic major often did not resonate with long-term career plans. Instead, their majors sufficed in their maintenance of eligibility for competition. Moreover, there was uncertainty about viable career paths because the participants often lacked real-world experience within different jobs and work environments. As a result, the transactional imagery of fulfilling academic obligations for eligibility replicated in the work environment. The participants transitioned into work roles that only addressed their basic necessities. Instead of the participants evaluating whether their career transition would fulfill their aspirations and values, they seemed to only consider whether they were suitable for available jobs. The theory of work adjustment proposes two factors for fitness between a person and a work environment: satisfaction and satisfactoriness (Lofquist & Dawis, 1969). Satisfaction reflects the fulfillment of a person’s needs and welfare, while

satisfactoriness reflects that the person can fulfill work duties (Hesketh & Griffin, 2005). In the case of the former Division 1 Black, male, first-generation college basketball and football student-athletes in this study, their college development and maturation pushed them to forfeit satisfaction for satisfactoriness. While they might desire jobs aligning with their values and career needs, they seemingly had to settle for career opportunities in which they could merely complete the assigned work duties.

Nigrescence Theory (HBCU)

William Cross's (1991) nigrescence theory proposes a model for understanding Black identity development. This theory offers five original stages of development that were condensed to the following four stages: Pre-Encounter, Encounter, Immersion-Emersion, and Internalization (as cited in Vandiver, Fhagen-Smith, Cokley, Cross, & Worrell, 2001; Vandiver et al., 2002). Furthermore, this theory suggests that a Black person negotiates their racial presentation, which affects mental wellness and self-identity (as cited in Vandiver, Cross, Worrell, & Fhagen-Smith, 2002). Within this study, there were unexpected findings regarding the unique experiences of the participants attending an HBCU compared to attending a PWI. While this was not an intended area of inquiry, the reflections from the participants indicated major differences regarding belongingness and connection to their campus environment. Generally, they denoted the similar experience of athletic identity being most important, but the sense of integration into the campus community was divergent.

The findings illustrated that former Division 1 Black, male, first-generation college basketball and football student-athletes in this study who attended a PWI often did not feel belongingness within their campuses. Sport-related environments were the

primary places in which these student-athletes felt they mattered and belonged. Conversely, the findings showed that former Division I Black, male, first-generation college basketball and football student-athletes who attended an HBCU had more integration in the campus community. The main catalyst for this experience was the immense representation of the general population of students who shared their cultural history and racial identity. The presence of more students and staff who looked like them created more connection and seemed to promote more opportunities to develop another identity outside of sport. There were no clear indications that the HBCU experience yielded greater transitional outcomes than the PWI experience. However, the difference in campus integration indicated there might be valuable transitional consequences for the participants attending an HBCU. Since the distinct stages of nigrescence theory led to greater understanding of Black identity, the HBCU experience might foster increased prospects for internalization in which their self-identity integrates Black identity. As a result, this insight might yield more direction for prospective careers because the student-athletes might discover work opportunities addressing matters important to their welfare and the welfare of others sharing a similar lineage and background.

Intersection of Needs

Another important consideration from this research was the intersection of needs regarding the decision behind the career pursuits of the participants. Specifically, this consequence coincided with several theories and concepts, including the following: psychology of working theory, career preparedness, career maturity, self-determination theory, and Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Since the participants in this study were often identified by their athletic capabilities, their needs with respect to career development

were stifled. As a result, their need for career exposure did not materialize during the college matriculation process, which affected consequential needs for a successful transition into the world of work.

According to the concept of career maturity, a person is considered mature with respect to career navigation based on their attitudes surrounding their competence toward constructing their career (Super, 1955; Super et al., 1996). Furthermore, the person's attitudes position them to make necessary choices, decisions, and plans about their career endeavors (Crites, 1978; Savickas, 2002). Based on these attitudes, the person would harness a sense of readiness and preparedness (Phillips & Blustein, 1994) for their career journey because they would possess self-knowledge, awareness of careers, and decision-making skills (Peterson et al., 2002; Phillips & Blustein, 1994). The findings showed that former Division 1 Black, male, first-generation college basketball and football student-athletes in this study were unable to engage many activities away from sport. As a result, they held limited knowledge about their broad interests and potential career opportunities. These limitations stunted their career maturity and preparedness to navigate the transition into the world of work.

A consequence of this limitation was the participants' views surrounding their career trajectory. While all the participants experienced immediate, or quick transitions into lives without competitive athletic play, their initial career pursuits involved sport-related interests. Since sport represented an important part of the participants' identities, it seemed as if their athletic identity was the only part of themselves that could be considered with respect to their careers. Sport was the primary in which the participants seemed to feel competent and connected. Based on the premise of self-determination

theory, human motivation is driven by the fulfillment of the following psychological needs: competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Unfortunately, the former Division 1, Black, male, first-generation college basketball and football student-athletes in this study navigated college experiences in which they had restricted control of their schedules, limited connection to non-athletic spaces, and limited exposure to a variety of non-athletic activities. Consequently, they often seemed to feel that they could not direct career pursuits that did not first consider a sport-related path. Furthermore, the limited sport-related opportunities resulted in the participants pursuing careers via extrinsic motivation rather than intrinsic motivation (Deci, Olafsen, & Ryan, 2017). Essentially, they assumed work roles without much consideration of their interests, values, and aspirations because their initial career pursuit held limited work opportunities.

Since the participants had limited control of their college experiences, their career pursuits were often not self-determined. Specifically, the lack of belongingness to spaces outside of sport made the study participants susceptible to not identifying work environments to which they felt connected. The psychology of working theory suggests that working can fulfill the needs of survival and power, social connection, and self-determination (Duffy, Blustein, Diemer, & Autin, 2016). Given their college experiences, the participants in this study were predisposed to sport-related career pursuits based on their sense of belongingness and perceived competence. As a result, their development positioned them to primarily feel satisfied completing work related to sports. However, the lack of widespread sport-related opportunities meant that the participants often assumed the first available roles in which they were competent, but not necessarily roles

in which they desired. This outcome countered the notion of workplace satisfaction of basic psychological needs, which reflects tenets of autonomy and personal wellness within self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) and the theory of work adjustment (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984; Lofquist & Dawis, 1969).

In addition, the findings highlighted tenets of Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs in which people have basic, psychological, and self-fulfillment needs that affect their motivation. A core tenet is that lower-level needs (e.g., basic needs) must be satisfied before higher-level needs (e.g., self-actualization) can be pursued. The participants in this study indicated that their career pursuits had to consider satisfying needs, such as job security, shelter, and bills. As a result, the participants were unable to pursue decent work, which considers viable work opportunities, worker rights, healthcare, personal values, and pay, or exercise work volition, which reflects a person's sense of choice in career decision-making (Duffy et al., 2016). Furthermore, the lack of development stifled the participants' career adaptability as shown through their perceived control of career plans, perceived self-efficacy to navigate the world of work, and intrapersonal aptitude for career possibilities (Savickas, 2002; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). Due to various gaps in their development, the former Division 1, Black, male, first-generation college basketball and football student-athletes in this study often settled within their career endeavors because they were not primed to fulfill needs, such as maximizing their career potential and purpose.

Implications for Practice

Limited exposure to career possibilities and real-world experiences appeared to be the deficiencies for former Division 1 Black, male, first-generation college basketball and

football student-athletes in this study. Although the participants engaged in the mandatory student activities at their respective institutions, their overall experiences were vastly different from the experiences for the general population of students. In particular, they often experienced an imbalanced college experience due to more engagement in sport activities compared to academic activities (Kelly & Dixon, 2014). Therefore, former Division 1 Black, male, first-generation college basketball and football student-athletes in this study were not incentivized to develop additional interests outside of sport. While the current structure led to overemphasizing and reinforcing athletic identity, there were opportunities for gradual change with respect to promoting more efforts toward post-college opportunities not involving competitive athletic play.

The findings indicated that student-athletes in this study desired mentorship and streamlined direction. Given the research citing increased career self-efficacy for first-generation students partaking in mentorship, programming, and career development (Kezar, Hypolite, & Kitchen, 2020), former Division 1 Black, male, first-generation college basketball and football student-athletes in this study might have better career transitional outcomes with institutionalized practices including these activities. Furthermore, Cummins and O'Boyle (2015) indicate that institutional support and guidance from former student-athletes were worthwhile resources for transitional readiness. Mentorship could be structured through a peer system in which younger student-athletes have support from older student-athletes who might offer direction and firsthand experiences of navigating their support programs for career development resources. Also, mentorship could emerge through alumni of the athletic programs who offer perspectives about resources they pursued and insight of information they could

have used while they were college students. Offering mentorship via teammates and alumni could be monumental because the student-athletes would be receiving insight from people who have shared their exact experiences.

The findings also emphasized that former Division 1 Black, male, first-generation college basketball and football student-athletes in this study would like internship opportunities to help ease the transitional process. Research shows that engagement in practical work experiences can ease the transition into the world of work since people can envision themselves in another work role (Leonard & Schimmel, 2016) and solidify their efficacy for a specific job (Bayl-Smith & Griffin, 2015). For the participants, these realizations were vital because their student-athlete experiences prioritize athletic identity. Therefore, the participants were often unable to gain lived experience and a concrete insight regarding prospective work considerations. Approaches to mentorship would be supporting student-athletes with securing internship opportunities during the offseason. Given the lack of competitive play during those periods, the participants needed to be offered encouragement for pursuing seasonal work opportunities or internship positions so that they gained more awareness of the career paths that might fit their aspirations. If the participants were considering sport-related careers, athletic departments could have considered shadowing, training, or exposure opportunities that would not infringe upon the student-athlete's status as a current athletic participant. These opportunities could have included shadowing of athletic staff members or even ongoing mentoring discussion to help the student-athlete gain more insight and exposure. The impetus would have been ensuring the participants gained knowledge that will help them make informed decisions toward their career path.

Lastly, the findings showed that former Division 1 Black, male, first-generation college basketball and football student-athletes in this study thrived in transitioning when they have support. Previous literature has shown that student-athletes experience psychological and emotional distress when going through their transition out of sport (Russell, Cottingham, Barry, Lee, & Walsh, 2018). Therefore, mental health services for the participants could have been expanded and strengthened, especially when the transitional process was imminent. It would have been helpful for the participants to be aware of available services as they matured through college so that their propensity for help-seeking behavior was solidified. Research has also shown that student-athletes consider parents, coaches, and teammates as primary sources of support during their collegiate experiences (Adams, Coffee, & Lavalley, 2015). Furthermore, coaches and athletic personnel represent critical catalysts for student-athlete career development given the trust they share with student-athletes (Navarro & McCormick, 2017). While invigorating help-seeking behavior was necessary, support and encouragement from coaches and athletic staff held equal, if not more, importance. The participants needed to know that their coaches valued their well-being and pursuit of mental health services especially when considering experiences, such as post-college plans. Coaches and athletic staff were consequential to this process because the participants seemed to prioritize following their coaches' instructions. Therefore, coaches bolstering consideration of post-college plans could have generated more activity from student-athletes towards their transitional preparation.

Future Research Considerations

Given that this research sought to explore the lived experiences of former Division 1 Black, male, first-generation college basketball and football student-athletes who have transitioned out of sport into the world of work, there are several inquiries that can be pursued beyond this study. Further research might explore how different situations, such as career-ending injuries, professional deselection, and voluntary retirement, affect the transitional experiences of these student-athletes. Also, considerations of institutionalized support programs, peer mentorship systems, and designated internships might unveil different outcomes and insight regarding the ease of the transitional process for Division 1 Black, male, first-generation basketball and football student-athletes. Also, future research might consider how the transitional process differs when exploring student-athletes who competed at Division II, Division III, and NAIA level institutions. This insight might create a broader picture of the systemic consequences of collegiate sports on transitional experiences into the world of work. Another potential inquiry could include the exploration of differences within the transitional experiences for Black student-athletes who attend an HBCU compared to a PWI.

In addition to topical consideration, further research might include more theoretical exploration and quantitative methodological approaches. For example, career construction theory might be an important theoretical lens to explore and gain understanding of how student-athletes might view work for their lives. In particular, career construction theory suggests that individuals engage in interpretive and interpersonal processes to develop their work identity, shape behaviors for work pursuits, and establish purpose for their careers (Savickas, 2013). Given the experiences of the

former Division 1 Black, male, first-generation college basketball and football student-athletes in this study, career construction theory could explore processes shaping career pursuits and the potential value of certain careers within this population. Based on career adaptability, this theory might inform how Black student-athletes and first-generation student-athletes develop their sense of awareness, autonomy, exploration, and self-efficacy associated with career development (Savickas, 2013). Also, career construction theory might provide further insight regarding how Black student-athletes and first-generation student-athletes use their lived experience and future aspirations to orient their career pursuits (Ryba et al., 2017; Ryba et al., 2021).

Furthermore, established constructs, such as career decision-making difficulties, career self-efficacy, career optimism, and career maturity, can be explored with concerted focus on the experiences of Black student-athletes and first-generation student-athletes. Another potential avenue might include the development of a culturally specific assessment tool that is normed on Black student-athletes and first-generation student-athletes. Given the established literature, many constructs and measures have been developed without intentional inclusion of the nuances for different experiences. Therefore, expanding current measures or creating novel tools can provide useful and applicable resources to assist student-athletes, especially Black student-athletes and first-generation student-athletes, from a contextually relevant lens. Overall, the avenue for exploring the transitional experiences of Division 1 Black, male, first-generation college basketball and football student-athletes is vast and there are various research ideas to pursue to address the challenges and complexities of transitioning out of sport.

Limitations of the Research

While this study garnered much insight about the transitional experiences of former Division 1 Black, male, first-generation college basketball and football student-athletes, there were limitations. This study aimed to gather the lived experiences of these student-athletes as they navigated their college and post-college experiences. However, this study did not gather immense details about family expectations for career pursuits. While few participants mentioned their parents' role in providing encouragement for career plans, there was no thorough exploration of how their parents' expectations influenced career decisions.

Another limitation of this study was that participants were interviewed about retrospective experiences. Although they provided rich raw data, there was a likelihood that their recollection has been clouded by misremembering events or having variant outcomes within their career trajectory. Their distance from the immediate transitional experience risked skewing their insight towards their current circumstances and life standing as opposed to their experiences during the transitional process.

Also, the study attracted participants via snowball sampling. While the population of interest was narrow, this sampling method posed challenges with attracting a wide array of participants. Fortunately, the study garnered participants representing Division 1 institutions across a wide region and within different competitive levels (e.g., Power 5 vs. mid-majors). However, this sample yielded four participants who shared experiences from the same athletic programs. There were two participants who went to one institution together and another two participants who attended a different institution together. While each participant offered unique experiences and background, their origin from the same academic institution and athletic program did not guarantee differences and novelty in

their experiences. In addition, the snowball sampling created a somewhat homogenous sample given that the participants identified as Black men who were also first-generation Division 1 basketball and football student-athletes. As a result, the participants within this study were likely to have similar experiences despite them all not attending the same institutions.

Furthermore, data were collected over an 8-month period due to challenges with identifying participants meeting the exclusion criteria. Due to this limitation, participant engagement decreased for a few of the participants with respect to the member checking process. The study included narratives for seven participants. However, only three participants contributed to the member checking process. While they offered agreement with the findings and results, their reflections emphasized how their individual voices were represented within the study as opposed to considering the complete representation of all the participants.

Lastly, the results from this study are not generalizable to all Division 1 basketball and football student-athletes, or even Black men who are first-generation college students and have competed in Division 1 basketball and football. Instead, these results can only affirm the experiences of the participants included in this specific study. While the results are not generalizable to the population of interest, the results achieved a different goal within case study research, which is generalizing and expanding the understanding of existing theories (Yin, 2018). Ultimately, the research findings were not able to provide conclusions for the experiences of this population, but the implemented theories could be expanded for greater depth.

Conclusion

The transition out of sport into the world of work was a critical inquiry for former Division 1 Black, male, first-generation college basketball and football student-athletes in this study. Given the expectations for sport-related careers and the lack of available jobs, the participants faced a consequential crossroad of enduring this inevitable process and receiving the necessary resources to navigate the transition. While transitioning was already a complicated process, the participants encountered greater complexity as they were undergoing a novel experience. The lack of vicarious insight burdened them with balancing their development as a student-athlete and their preparation for the next phase of life. This process was quite difficult and posed some important considerations.

The results of this study found that the navigation of the transitional experience from sport into the world of work for the former Division 1 Black, male, first-generation college basketball and football college student-athletes in this study was influenced by five themes: (1) athletic identity reinforcement, (2) lack of self-directed choices, (3) connection through identifiable spaces, (4) village-based support, and (5) career decision-making difficulties. The participants were often consumed by their sport endeavors that they are affirmed only when they occupy athletic environments. Furthermore, their experiences reinforced the notion that they were athletes before any other identity was relevant. Therefore, consistent athletic participation limited how they could develop themselves regarding their potential transition out of sport into the world of work.

Given the focus on athletic identity, the former Division 1 Black, male, first-generation college basketball and football student-athletes were unable to make choices that would shape more holistic college experiences. When considering courses and extra-curricular development, the participants were forced to build their schedules around their

athletic obligations. Therefore, they were unable to pursue certain academic paths, which often influences career outcomes and trajectories. With the overemphasis of athletic identity, the participants engendered a sense of separation from the general student population and campus environment. As a result, their sense of belongingness was often limited to athletic spaces, which shaped how they felt about being welcomed in environments that were not sport related. In turn, this structure inclined them to consider athletic-related career roles before non-athletic-related career roles because their sense of familiarity and relatability lay within sports.

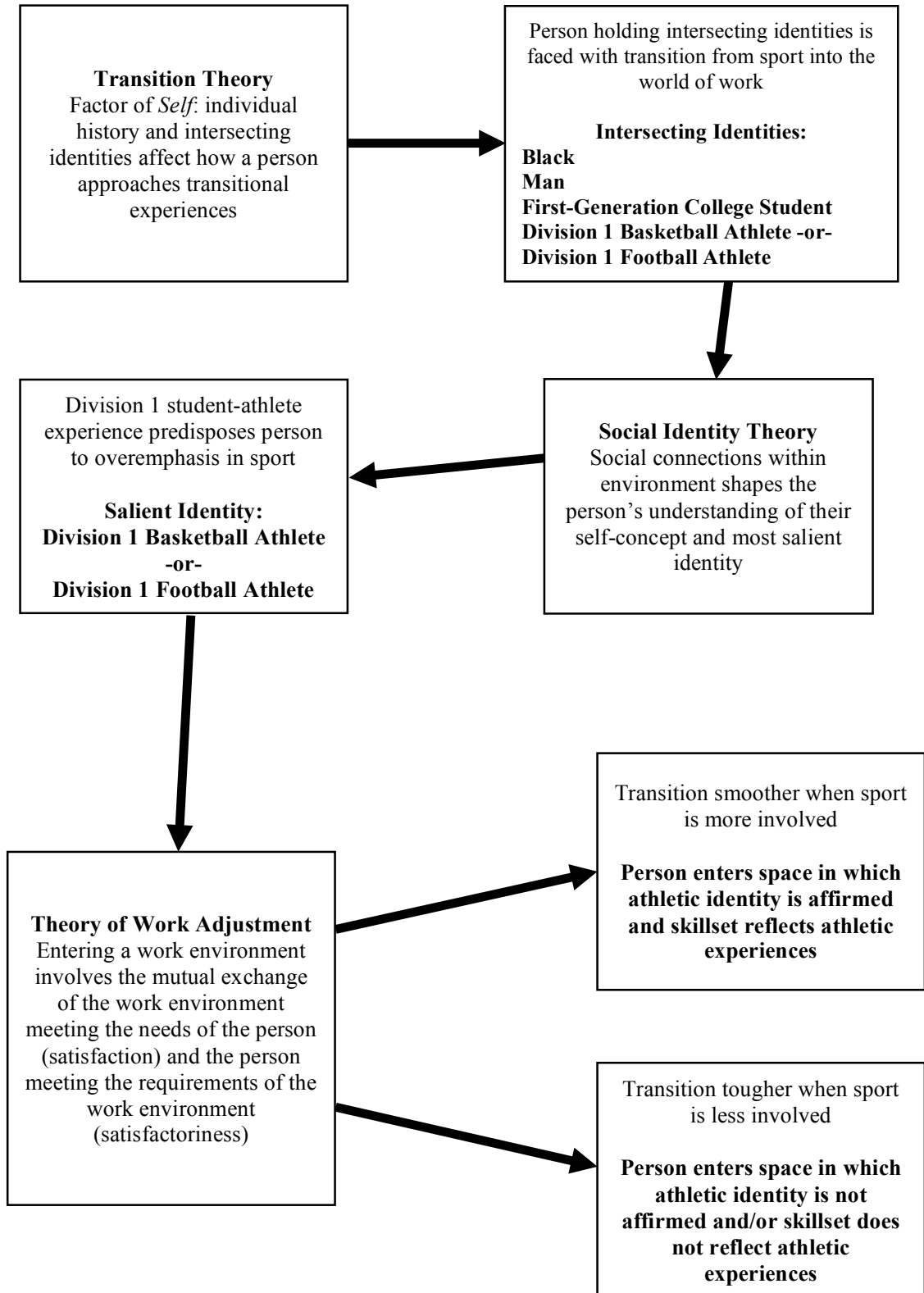
Given the hyperfocus on athletics, the former Division 1 Black, male, first-generation college basketball and football student-athletes in this study needed various supports to help them navigate the transition from sport into the world of work. Support via relationships, such as mentors, coaches, and parents, might have been sufficient to prompt the participants to consider their post-college preparation. However, the most necessary support seemed to revolve around intentional academic and career planning, exposure to work expectations via internships, and emotional support for grieving the end of competitive athletic play amidst the transition into the world of work. Without these supports, there seemed to be increased chances that the participants would endure more demanding transitional experiences. The potential consequences of lacking transitional preparation included acceptance of unfulfilling jobs, confusion about next steps, and feeling restricted to pursuing sport-related careers.

The termination of sport involvement after college was an inevitable reality for most college basketball and football student-athletes. However, the preparation for this foreseeable was disillusioning. The former Division 1, Black, male, first-generation

college basketball and football student-athletes in this study were inundated with athletic activities, which established impractical precedents for post-college career realities. In particular, the participants incurred compounding challenges related to it as they were not only enduring the demanding life of a student-athlete, but they were also navigating the college environment without vicarious insight from family members. Without this social capital, the former Division 1 Black, male, first-generation college basketball and football student-athletes in this study were destined for complications because they often did not have a safety net that would protect them if sport career pursuits were unsuccessful. Given this information, there needs to be a call for the NCAA, athletic departments, and academic institutions to reconsider the current structure for the student-athlete experience. This reimagination needs to incorporate appropriate strategies and resources to help student-athletes, especially Black, male, first-generation college basketball and football student-athletes, navigate the unavoidable transition out of sport into the world of work. Until this renovation occurs, the cycle of student-athletes, especially Black, male, first-generation student-athletes, struggling to establish stable and viable career trajectories will continue.

Appendix A

Theoretical Synthesis Chart



Appendix B

Screenener

1. What is your age (open-ended response)?
2. What is your gender?
 - a) Male
 - b) Female
 - c) Prefer not to respond
3. What is your race/ethnicity?
 - a) Black/African-American
 - b) White
 - c) Asian-American/Pacific Islander
 - d) Latino/Hispanic
 - e) Native American
 - f) Other (please specify): _____
4. What is your current employment status?
 - a) Full-Time
 - b) Part-Time
 - c) Unemployed
 - d) Entrepreneur
5. How long have you been employed in your current position (open-ended response)?
6. Are you a first-generation college student?
 - a) Yes
 - b) No
7. Please indicate the month and year when you last participated in Division 1 basketball or football (open-ended response).
8. Please indicate the month and year that you completed your undergraduate degree or indicate the month and year when you last attended your undergraduate institution (open-ended response).
9. Please briefly list all career, volunteer, and personal endeavors (e.g., part-time/full-time jobs, community service, professional athletic career pursuits) following the completion of your undergraduate degree or last attendance at your undergraduate institution (open-ended response).

10. What type of institution did you attend for your undergraduate education?
- a) Public
 - b) Private
 - c) Religious
11. What was the approximate size of your college campus?
- a) 1–5,000
 - b) 5,001–10,000
 - c) 10,001–15,000
 - d) 15,001–20,000
 - e) 20,001+
12. Were you a transfer student?
- a) Yes
 - b) No
13. During your primary and secondary educational years, were you part of a free/reduced lunch program?
- a) Yes
 - b) No
14. Who were the parents/guardians that lived in your household while growing up (open-ended response)?
15. What were the jobs of your parents/guardians in your household (open-ended response)?

Appendix C

Interview Protocol

College Reflections

1. Tell me about your college experience.
 - If applicable, what led to your decision to transfer schools?
2. What was your college major and how did you arrive at your decision?
3. What sport did you play? In terms of being a basketball/football student-athlete, what was your schedule like?
4. As a Black, male, basketball/football student-athlete, how did you feel you fit in on campus?
 - Where on campus did you feel most welcome? Least welcome?
5. As a Black male, how did you feel you fit in on campus?
 - Where on campus did you feel most welcome? Least welcome?
6. As a Black, male, first-generation college student, how did you feel you fit in on campus?
 - Where on campus did you feel most welcome? Least welcome?
7. What kinds of activities, organizations, clubs, etc. did you participate in outside of sport?
 - How did you like these activities?
8. What sorts of academic activities did you participate in besides attending class?
 - How did you like these activities?
9. What careers did you consider pursuing prior to finishing/leaving college?
 - How did you arrive at these career options?

10. What resources/support did you seek while exploring career options?

- Which resources/support were most helpful? Least helpful?

11. How prepared did you feel to transition into the workforce? Why?

Post-College Reflections

1. When did you determine that playing professional sports was not in your future?

- How did you feel about this reality?

2. What jobs/positions have you had since finishing/leaving college?

- What led you to choose these jobs?
- How did you like those roles?

3. How many job changes have you made since leaving college?

- What influenced the job change(s)?

4. How did your identity as a Black, male, first-generation student influence the career path you followed?

5. How did your identity as Black, male student-athlete influence the career path you followed?

6. How do you feel about your current job? Why?

7. How do you feel about your career trajectory? Why?

- How does your identity as a Black, male, first-generation college student influence your response?
- How does your identity as a former Black, male student-athlete influence your response?

8. How do you feel you fit in at current work environment? Previous work environment(s)?

- How do you feel your identity as a Black, male, first-generation college student affected how connected/supported you felt in your work environment(s)?
- How do you feel your identity as a former Black, male student-athlete affected how connected/supported you felt in your work environment(s)?

9. If you could relive your college experience, what, if anything, would you change?

10. Is there anything else you would like to share?

Appendix D

Demographic Data

Name	B	Benaiah	Eric	Jamer	John*	Nas*	Tony
<i>Last Year of School Attendance</i>	2015	2014	2016	2015	2015	2011	2016
<i>DI School Population</i>	20,001+	10,001–15,000	20,001+	20,001+	20,001+	15,001–20,000	10,001–15,000
<i>Finished Degree</i>	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Transfer</i>	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
<i>Current Work Status</i>	Part Time	Full Time	Full Time	Full Time	Grad Student	Full Time	Full Time
<i>Number of Post-College Jobs</i>	5	2	2	4	4	5	3

*Brief athletic playing career

Appendix E

Initial Codes

Initial Code	N of Participants Contributing (N=7)	N of Transcript Excerpts Assigned	Sample Quote
Academic Experience	7	42	Just like staying true to like why I'm really in school. You know how they say student-- they say student athlete. Like they kind of switch it like, to make it seem like you're here for sports, and then school was secondary. But you know what I'm saying that was something that I learned, like, these people really don't care about you the way you think they do. Because it's like, even our coaches like-- our coaches used to tell us like, "You all's play affects me putting food in my children's mouth." - Eric
Belongingness (Campus)	7	52	So being at [my Division 1 institution] was different, but it was something I come from. You know, I come from all predominately black. - Tony
Belongingness (General)	3	6	Just you know, when you know, when you see kids, and they see somebody that they want to mimic, or they just look up to just by the presence, like sometimes your presence is just enough, and you feel like you're comfortable enough to share and stuff because there's always going to be a space where especially like when community service, I don't just try to do something for a good deal and say I did it, I really, it's a really a connection piece, when you go in those in those things. - Nas
Belongingness (Work)	6	38	So, and not even not just athletes. It's not black people. Because if we're talking about being with the NFL team, we know that 70-- data shows 76 77, something like that, whatever it is, percent of NFL athletes are black. But then you get into the office spaces, and it's maybe one, two percent Black, maybe. I'm pushing on the 2% for sure. But that's what the world sees. - John
First Generation	5	15	And if you could have seen the looks on our face, we were pretty dumbfounded because, you know. Obviously, we, you know, we didn't have the opportunity to have siblings go to college or parents go to college, you know, or understand exactly what all of that entails. - Benaiah

Initial Code	N of Participants Contributing (N=7)	N of Transcript Excerpts Assigned	Sample Quote
Future Planning	7	52	Now, if you ask, like, "Well, how do you think that ties into, you know, your college experience too?" You know, I can tell you, like, if I just, I can say, if I, I don't know, if I have more of a direct path, right, like in terms of like, what I wanted to do. You know, maybe a little bit more knowledge in terms of like, just academically. I don't know, man. You know, if I chose a different major, or maybe just had a little bit more support, or people in my life, you never know how things could turn out. You know, because I think a lot of a lot of success has to do with who you know, and the network that you build. - Jamer
Hardship	6	25	But I saw the struggles that I had when I transferred to Missouri State as meaning as working out and trying to work out to the hardest of your ability. And with the structure, it was good and bad at the same time, because it was trying to find that balance of trying to find me was like who am I as a person forget the sport part. - Nas
HBCU Experience	2	4	Well, I went to an HBCU, so I can get at that. At HBCU, man, it was kind of like I felt like a king. You know, like man, HBCUs man. I mean, I encourage other races to go like, they going to take care of you. They make sure you got everything you need, not saying the other schools are not, but the love and support that they give out, you know what I'm saying. They're not gonna charge you an arm and a leg to go to a school. They're gonna try to work with you, the financial team. Because it's all black people, and they want to help other black people. So, I would prefer an HBCU. But you know, every college is giving you an education. No education is better than another education. It's all education. - Tony
Motivation for Career	2	4	Well, I can say about the job I've been having, I've never been happy. You know, the money be cool, but money don't make you happy, if you don't love the job you do. You know, it's only just a large amount of money, but you still sad, you still mad because you're doing this job you don't want to. So, I wasn't happy at all with those jobs. I wasn't happy with those jobs. You know what I'm saying, I had to do what I had to do to keep and maintain bills and maintain things, but I wasn't happy. - Tony

Initial Code	N of Participants Contributing (N=7)	N of Transcript Excerpts Assigned	Sample Quote
Non-Athletic Opportunities	1	1	I mean I just really didn't do a lot. You know, I might go to community service, things like that, that were outside of the classroom. I might read to a classroom. I would go read to some students, things like that. But, you know, I would try to get to a school where it was just a mixed group of kids, you know, because then they get to see the black student athletes. And I didn't want them to see me in just the athlete view, but they also knew why we were there. But you know, even that little bit of a disconnect from the teachers. They introduced you as, you know, "Hey, these are the athletes from [my Division 1 institution]." They go [there], and they play football, and they play baseball and basketball. But to teachers' credit too, they're trying to liven up the group a little bit, get them excited. But also, you did have a chance to like, talk about doing homework, being on top of, you know, academics. It was never just sports. I want to be honest there. - John
PWI Experience	5	21	So, on campus, we kind of stuck out because, you know, we're the first football team and you know, basketball players and football players, we're going to stand out. So, you don't want to stand out. But it's like, being an African American or Black, you pretty much always gonna stand out. Because going to [my Division 1 institution], we call it a PWI, White institution. You're gonna stand out because there's not a lot of a lot of us there. - B
Resources	7	81	Yeah, so we had like, academic advisors. So that's, you know, they were very supportive of us, you know. So, I had like my favorite one, his name was Lance, you know. And pretty much if I was falling behind academically or whatever, like he would, he would always just be there. Just pick me up and just be like, "Yo, you got to get on the academics," things like that. So, I will say like, the academic advisors, they did a good job within. They were extremely supportive on campus wise. - Jamer
Scheduling	7	36	It was hard at times because the rigors of Division 1 basketball, you really don't have your own schedule. It's really kind of structured for yourself throughout the team dynamic. So, I always prioritized my education, but it was more of trying to find out what do I want to do if basketball doesn't work. - Nas

Sport Experience	3	6	It's like they can say they care about you, but so it's a relationship where it's like, "What have you done for me lately?" And most of that is reflected upon your play. So, I also had a very unique situation because I also had four surgeries. I tore my right shoulder twice, tore my left shoulder once, and then my first surgery was my lateral meniscus in my knee. So, every year, once I realized it was a business, I didn't really realize it to like going into my sophomore year. I was like, "Man, the most important thing for me is to play." Because when I'm not playing and when I'm hurt, they don't talk to me. It's cutthroat like that. You know, so you get walked by. It's kind of stuff like that just really opened my eyes. - Eric
Transition to Work	7	36	I mean, as a black football player, your first thought is the NFL. Next, they got the Canadian League, XFL, maybe even coaching. You could think about doing different things like that. And those like kind of one lane that you can go to, if you want to still stick with the sports, maybe even personal trainer, different things like that dealing with muscle groups, or you can go into whatever you study. In my position, it was mathematics, it was like be a math teacher, banker, accountant, different things like that. So that's kind of the different paths that I was thinking about taking. - B
Transition within Work	6	25	I mean, ultimately, I like real estate. I want to dive a little bit deeper, you know, in that aspect, and the entrepreneur field. So yeah, I recently just received my license. - Benaiah

Appendix F

Axial Codes

Initial Code	Axial Codes
Academic Experience	Academic Relationships, Eligibility, Major Selection, Physical Health, Study Groups, Transferring
Belongingness (Campus)	Black Students Are Only Athletes, Connection to Home, HBCU, Professional Fraternity, Social Fraternity, Sport Is First, Sport Status
Belongingness (General)	General Area Offers Connection, Offseason Support, Sport Is Only Source
Belongingness (Work)	Abilities, Age, Authenticity, Blackness, Connection to Sport, Familiarity, Professionalism, Unknown Passion
First Generation	Concerns about Home, Family Support, Lack of Family Knowledge, Leaving School, No Individual Awareness, Social Mobility
Future Planning	Athletic Specific Classes, Connection with Kids, Going to Pros, Internships, Interests from High School, Limited Awareness of Opportunities, Mentorship, No Preparation, No Professional Sports, No Specific Route, Stable Opportunities
Hardship	Academic Challenges, Athletic Ability/Expectations, Avoiding Troubles of Home, Balancing Family Concerns, Balancing Sport and Sport, Living Conditions, Maintaining Sense of Self, Mental Health, Scholarship, Walk-On
HBCU Experience	Connection to Home, People Looking Like Me
Motivation for Career	Earning Good Money, Purposeful Work
Non-Athletic Opportunities	Connection to Larger Community
PWI Experience	Athletic Identity Reinforcement, Self-Exploration, Smaller Community with Black Students
Resources	Academic Advisors, Business Awareness, Campus Partnership, Coaches, Conferences, High School, No Resources, Peers/Classmates, Personal Connection (Family), Wanting an Internship
Scheduling	Changes after Season, D1 Overbooked, Ease of Rigor, Junior College Not Rigorous, More Student-Athlete Autonomy, No Choice, Outside Activities Limited, Sport Dictates School
Sport Experience	New Football Team
Transition to Work	Athletic Identity Conflict, Earning Good Money, Instability of Sport, Limited Skills, Networking, Next Opportunity, Physical Health
Transition within Work	Job to Get By, Milestones

Appendix G

Axial Code Initial Introduction

Initial Code	Benaiah	Nas	Jamer	John	Tony	B	Eric
Academic Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Study Group 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Major Selection • Eligibility 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic Relationships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transferring 		
Belongingness (Campus)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connection to Home • HBCU • Professional Fraternity • Social Fraternity • Sport Is First 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Black Students Are Only Athletes 					
Belongingness (General)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General Area Offers Connection • Sport Is Only Source 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offseason Support 		
Belongingness (Work)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age • Blackness • Professionalism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connection to Sport • Familiarity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authenticity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abilities • Unknown Passion 			
First Generation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of Family Knowledge • Leaving School 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family Support • No Individual Awareness • Social Mobility 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concerns about Home 		

Initial Code	Benaiah	Nas	Jamer	John	Tony	B	Eric
Future Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentorship • No Preparation • No Specific Route 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connection with Kids • No Professional Sports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Athletic Specific Classes • Going to Pros 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interests from High School • Limited Awareness of Opportunities 		
HBCU Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People Looking Like Me 						
Hardship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoiding Troubles of Home • Balance School and Sport 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintaining Sense of Self 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental Health • Balancing Family Concerns 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic Challenges • Athletic Ability/Expectations • Living Conditions • Scholarship • Walk-on 		
Motivation for Career					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purposeful Work 		
Non-Athletic Opportunities				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connection to Larger Community 			
PWI Experience		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-Exploration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Athletic Identity Reinforcement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smaller Community with Black Students 			

Initial Code	Benaiah	Nas	Jamer	John	Tony	B	Eric
Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coaches • Conferences • High School • Personal Connection (Family) • Wanting an Internship 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Campus Partnership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic Advisors • Business Awareness • No Resources 				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peers/Classmates
Scheduling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • D1 Overbooked 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Junior College Not Rigorous • More Student-Athlete Autonomy • No Choice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ease of Rigor • Sport Dictates School 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outside Activities Limited 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes after Season 	
Sport Experiences						<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Football Team 	
Transition to Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Networking • Next Opportunity 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Athletic Identity Conflict • Earning Good Money • Instability of Sport • Physical Health 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited Skills 			
Work Transition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job to Get By • Milestones 						

Appendix H

Data Saturation Process

Interview Participant	Benaiah	Nas	Jamer
New Codes Per Interview	27	19	15
# Base Codes	61		

Interview Participant	John	Tony
New Codes Per Interview	7	13
New Codes in Run	20	

After 5 Interviews			
# New Codes/Run	=	20	32.8%
# Base Codes		61	

Interview Participant	B	Eric
New Codes Per Interview	2	1
New Codes in Run	3	

After 7 Interviews			
# New Codes/Run	=	3	4.9%
# Base Codes		61	

Appendix I

Emergent Themes and Subthemes

Theme	N of Participants Contributing (N=7)	N of Transcript Excerpts Assigned
THEME 1: ATHLETIC IDENTITY REINFORCEMENT	7	16
Belongingness	5	6
Daily Scheduling	3	4
Post-Graduate Visioning	2	3
Accessing and Using Developmental Resources	3	3
THEME 2: LACK OF SELF-DIRECTED CHOICES	7	13
Major Selection	4	5
Scheduling Necessary and Auxiliary Activities	5	8
THEME 3: CONNECTION THROUGH IDENTIFIABLE SPACES	7	33
Campus Belongingness	6	11
Post-College Sport Pursuits	5	9
Measuring Up Away from Sport	5	8
Relatability within Work Environments	4	5
THEME 4: VILLAGE-BASED SUPPORT	7	21
Interpersonal Networks	4	7
Intrapersonal Skill Development	7	14
<i>Academic Support</i>	3	5
<i>Career Support</i>	4	7
<i>Mental Health Support</i>	2	2
THEME 5: CAREER DECISION-MAKING DIFFICULTIES	7	18
Readiness for the Transition into the World of Work	4	5
Interim Value of Work	5	9
Realizing Their Passions	4	4

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VITA

Christopher D. Lewis was born on June 30, 1991, in Torrance, CA. Chris grew up in Inglewood, CA and attended St. Albert the Great School (Compton, CA) and Verbum Dei High School (Los Angeles, CA), where he graduated as valedictorian of both schools. During his primary and secondary educational years, Chris competed in basketball on the AAU circuit and within the CIF Southern Section, which is where his interest in sport and balancing life outside of sport emerged. Prior to starting his college education, Chris also received the Gates Millennium Scholarship. He attended Amherst College (Amherst, MA) and completed the Bachelor of Arts in Chemistry degree in May 2013. Months after finishing his undergraduate education, he enrolled at Loyola Marymount University (Los Angeles, CA) where he earned the Master of Arts in Counseling in August 2016.